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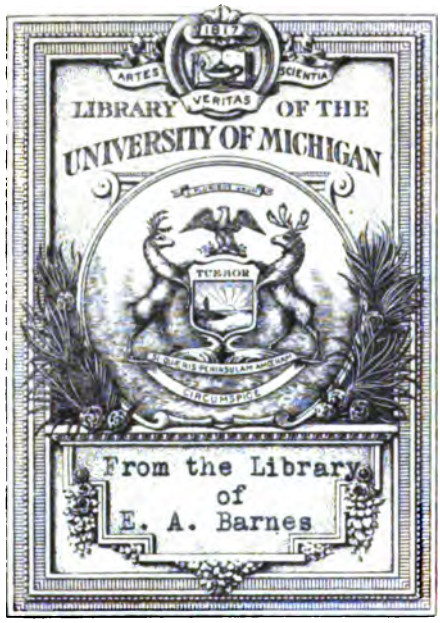

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On the First of May next will be published, in Octavo,

BY LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, & GREEN, LONDON,

NUMBER I.

(TO BE CONTINUED MONTHLY,)

Price 2s. 6d.

OF THE

MAGAZINE OF NATURAL HISTORY,

AND

JOURNAL OF ZOOLOGY, BOTANY, MINERALOGY,

CONDUCTED BY J. C. LOUDON, F.L.S. H.S. &c.

THE DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS EDITED BY GENTLEMEN EMINENT IN EACH.

The Drawings by BOWERBY *and* HARVEY, *and the Engravings by* BRANSTON.

ALL the natural objects which surround us are the subjects of Natural History, and much of the improvements and enjoyments of civilized life is founded on our knowledge of animals, vegetables, and minerals. Hence

more elementary details to higher views and discussions; and fourthly, to translate all the technical terms and Latin words as they occur, and to give the derivation and accentuation of all systematic names.

The January Number will always complete the Volumes for the year preceding, and will contain a summary or retrospective view of the advancement of the different departments of Natural History during the past year. This feature, peculiar to our work, will, it is presumed, considerably enhance its value to every class of readers.

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It is some satisfaction, in proposing this work, to know that it will interfere with no other at present existing. Though there are several highly respectable British Periodicals, in which the subject of Natural History, in common with almost every other Science, finds a place; and though there is the "Zoological Journal," embracing that particular department; yet there is not one in this country exclusively devoted to Natural History, and embracing that subject in its most extensive sense. It appears, therefore, that the present state of things demands a Magazine such as we have projected; and if we can realize our plan as fully as we hope to do, proportionate encouragement is confidently anticipated.

Something may require to be said as to the fitness of the Conductor for the direction of such an undertaking. All that he lays claim to, is some experience in arrangements connected with the press and publication; the literary merits of the work will depend more upon his coadjutors than on himself: he can only say that it is not very likely that a periodical of this sort would be undertaken by his publishers, or himself, without engaging competent assistance to justify the expense of commencing it and carrying it on; and for the rest he refers to the work itself when it shall appear. Those who understand this department of literature, know that the value of a periodical, such as the "Magazine of Natural History" is proposed to be, will depend less on splendid abilities in the Editors, than on great industry, sound judgment, and devotion to the subject. The Conductor will only farther add, that he will be happy to receive, from any quarter, the slightest hint for improvement, and every description of advice or assistance.

Communications addressed to "The Conductor of the Magazine of Natural History, at Messrs. Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green's, Paternoster-Row," will be thankfully received and acknowledged.

The following are particularly requested:—

1. Short accounts of the origin, progress, and present state of all the Provincial Societies devoted to the various departments of Natural History; together with accounts, from time to time, of their meetings, transactions, and articles received for their Libraries and Museums. The Secretaries of such Societies, it is hoped, will attend to this request.

2. Accounts of the origin, progress, and present state of Museums or Collections in the various departments of Natural History in the Empire, and whether public or private. For instance—of the Manchester Society of Natural History; of that of Bristol; of the Liverpool, Edinburgh, and Dublin Museums and Botanic Gardens; of the Aviaries at Knowlesley, Woburn Abbey, &c., the Collections of Preserved Birds at Clifford Hall, the Cabinet of Shells at Woodhall; of the Garden of Mosses at Tatton, the Collection of Insects at Bolton Lodge, &c. &c. The Curators of such establishments, it is hoped, will, with the permission of their principals, attend to this request.

3. We should be glad to enter into correspondence with British Naturalists abroad, and with Naturalists or Amateur Naturalists in remote parts of the country at home, for the supply of Calendars of Nature for Part VI. Art. 5; for information respecting the Floras, Faunas, Minerals, Geological Formations, or Meteorological Phenomena of different districts, and for such general intelligence on the subject as may promote the objects which we have enumerated.

J. C. L.

Bayswater, February, 1828.

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MEMORIALS

OF

SHAKSPEARE;

OR,

SKETCHES OF

HIS CHARACTER AND GENIUS,

BY VARIOUS WRITERS,

NOW FIRST COLLECTED:

WITH

A PREFATORY AND CONCLUDING ESSAY,

AND NOTES,

BY NATHAN DRAKE, M.D. H.A.L.

AUTHOR OF "SHAKSPEARE AND HIS TIMES," &c.

FORMING A VALUABLE ACCOMPANIMENT TO

EVERY EDITION OF THE POET.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

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It may be necessary to state that the Notes distinguished by the letters of the alphabet are from the pen of the Editor; whilst those marked by an asterisk are the production of the authors of their respective papers.

February, 1828.

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MEMORIALS OF SHAKSPEARE.

PART I.

PREFATORY ESSAY.

MEMORIALS

OF

SHAKSPEARE.

PREFATORY ESSAY,

Explanatory of the Plan of the Work, and containing an Inquiry into the Merits of Shakspeare's Principal Editors, Commentators, and Critics.

No AUTHOR has, perhaps, given rise to more extensive commentary, criticism, and persevering literary research than Shakspeare;* and none

* The very orthography and orthoepy of his name have become a subject of doubt, and have given rise to no slight controversy; though I am persuaded not only from the third signature to his will, which is indisputably written *William Shakspeare*, but from the following very curious document which has been communicated to me by Captain James Saunders, of Stratford-upon-Avon, who has with indefatigable industry collected a large mass of very valuable materials relative to the poet and his family, that the intermediate *e* was very seldom written, and yet more rarely pronounced.

"Notices of the Shakspeare's taken from the Entries of the Common Council of the Corporation of Stratford, from their book A.

certainly has better claims, from the excellency and utility of his writings, to every illustration

"The name of *John Shakspeare* occurs in this book 168 times under seventeen different modes of spelling, viz:

Modes.			
1.	Shackesper	4	times.
2.	Shackespere	4	
3.	Shacksper	2	
4.	Shaokspor	1	
5.	Shackspere	3	
6.	Shakespere	13	
7.	Shakspayr	1	
8.	Shaksper	1	
9.	Shakspere	5	
10.	Shakspeyr	15	
11.	Shakysper	3	
12.	Shakyspere	10	
13.	Shaxpeare	65	
14.	Shaxper	8	
15.	Shaxpere	23	
16.	Shaxspere	9	
17.	Shaxspeare	1	
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"One leading point of controversy," observes Captain Saunders, "seems to be materially put to rest by the preceding summary; viz. the pronunciation of the name at that time. The first syllable was, evidently, given short, without the lengthening and softness of the intermediate *e;* for only three such modes, embracing twenty-one instances, are to be found here. It must be allowed, a middle *y* occurs in two varieties of thirteen instances, which may be of doubtful authority; but the great body of testimony is in favour of the short power of the first syllable. There is much reason to presume that the 10th variety was the spelling and pronunciation of *John Shakspeare* himself; for they were his own accounts, or those of

which philology and philosophy can afford; especially since we know that the bard, partly from extrinsic circumstances, and partly from the innate modesty of his nature, which led him to a very humble estimate of his own merits, was prevented paying that attention to his productions which is now almost universally extended to every publication, however trivial in its subject, and insignificant in its style.

There are three modes by which it has been attempted, through the medium of the press, to illustrate and render more familiar the writings of Shakspeare, and these may be classed in the following order:—

1stly. Editions of Shakspeare accompanied by Prolegomena and copious Annotations.

2dly. Detached Publications exclusively appropriated to Shakspeare.

3dly. Criticisms on Shakspeare dispersed through various miscellaneous departments of literature.

It will be evident from the tenor of the

others made by him, and if not by himself, immediately under his inspection. The 13th mode is by far predominant, and was thus written by Mr. *Henry Rogers*, who was a man of education, and town-clerk, though even in his hand the 15th variety is sometimes seen."

I have only to add that, as the letter *x* was manifestly introduced as corresponding in sound with *ks*, and for the sake of dispatch perhaps in writing the name, the vast preponderance of examples under No. 13, ought and must, I should think, decide all doubts both as to the spelling and pronunciation.

present volume, that of these modes a selection from the last almost entirely occupies its pages; but before we proceed any farther in relation to its construction, it may not be useless or uninteresting to make a few observations on what has been effected for the poet in the two prior branches by his editors and more formal critics.

Nothing can place in a more striking point of view the incurious disposition of our ancestors with regard to literary and biographical information, than the circumstance that four folio editions[b] of the works of Shakspeare, who had been highly popular in his day, and in the most popular department of his art, were suffered to appear and occupy the space of nearly one hundred years without a single explanatory note, or the annexation of a

[b] It is well known that there were two impressions of the third folio edition of Shakspeare's Plays, one in 1663, and the other in 1664; the first with Droeshout's head of Shakspeare in the title-page, and the second without any engraving; but *both* these copies have been hitherto referred to as containing the spurious Plays; whereas the impression of 1663 does not include them, but ends with the play of Cymbeline, both in the catalogue prefixed, and in the book itself. In the title-page also of the copy of 1663, the work is said to be "Printed for Philip Chetwinde," whilst the impression of 1664 has only the initials of the bookseller, P. C. in the title-page. Both these copies, owing to the great fire of London occurring so soon after their publication, are even more scarce than the first folio; and I should add that, in three copies which I have seen of this folio of 1663, one of which is in my own possession, the head of Shakspeare exhibits a clear and good impression.

particle of biographical anecdote. Indeed, an apathy nearly approaching this appears to have existed until a late period in the eighteenth century; for, with the exception of Betterton, who took a journey into Warwickshire for the purpose of collecting information relative to the poet, scarcely an effort was made to throw any additional light upon his history until the era of Capell and Steevens, when, as might have been expected from such a lapse of time so unfortunately neglected, the keenest research retired from the pursuit baffled and disappointed.

The few facts which Betterton collected with such laudable and affectionate zeal at the close of the seventeenth century, were presented to the world by Rowe, who, in his edition of the bard in 1709, first gave to the admirers of dramatic genius a Life of Shakspeare. The fate of this document must be pronounced somewhat singular, and certainly undeserved; it had remained, until within these last seven years, nearly the sole source * and

* What, previous to Rowe, had been incidentally mentioned as connected with the name of Shakspeare by Dugdale, Fuller, Phillips, Winstanley, Langbaine, Blount, Gildon, and Anthony Wood, amounted to a mere trifle; and what has since transpired through the traditionary medium of Mr. Jones of Tarbick, and Mr. Taylor of Warwick, who died in 1790, and from the MS of Aubrey and Oldys, has added but little that can be depended upon. The researches, however, which have been lately made into the proceedings of the Bailiff's Court, the Register, and other public writings of the poet's native town, have happily contributed two or three facts to the scanty store.

undisputed basis of what little has been preserved to us of one so justly the pride and delight of his country, when Mr. Malone, the most indefatigable, and, in general, the most correct of the Shakspeare commentators, and who for half a century had been sedulously endeavouring to substantiate the few facts, and extend the meagre narrative of Rowe, suddenly turned round upon the hapless biographer, boasting, with a singular dereliction of all his former opinions, that he would prove eight out of the ten facts which Rowe had brought forward, to be false.

That he has in a great measure failed in this attempt, and left the credibility of Rowe's statements little shaken by the scepticism of his latter enquiries, must be a subject of congratulation to all who have dwelt with interest on the scanty memorials which time has spared us of the personal history of the poet. As it is scarcely indeed within the sphere of probability to suppose that at this distant period, when more than two centuries have passed since the death of its object, biography can supply us with many additional facts, it must assuredly be an ungrateful and thankless task to endeavour to strip us of what small portion had been treasured up, and to leave us on a subject, which, from its imperfect state, had excited deep regret, a perfect and remediless blank.

In every other part of his duty as an editor, Mr. Malone has exhibited remarkable efficiency and success, and his text may be justly consi-

dered as the purest and most correct extant. It is, indeed, not a little extraordinary that, previous to his labours, and we may add, with some qualification, those of Steevens, every editor of Shakspeare has grossly and knowingly deviated from the only authentic standards, the quartos and first folio. They have all, in fact, from Rowe to the era alluded to, acknowledged the necessity of, and professed an adherence to, these first impressions; and all, from indolence, presumption, or caprice, have, in a greater or less degree, deviated from, or neglected to consult them. Rowe took the fourth folio, which, like the second and third, is full of the most arbitrary alterations, as the basis of his text. Pope, though declaring his conviction of the paramount obligation of faithfully following the earliest text, based his own edition on that of Rowe; whilst Theobald, anxious to expose the errors of his immediate predecessor, committed a somewhat similar mistake, by giving us a corrected text from Pope instead of a copy of the first folio collated with the quartos. The numerous references, however, to these the primal editions, which were necessary to effect his purpose, enabled him to remove many corruptions; and, had he more uniformly submitted to their authority, he might have produced a copy of his author, to which, in point of accuracy of text, little could have been objected. But, though superior in industry and fidelity to Pope, he also

was not untainted with a spirit of innovation, and too often exhibited a capricious love of change.

Yet, inadequate as these editors proved themselves to the task which they undertook, they were in all the duties of their office greatly superior to their immediate successors, Sir Thomas Hanmer and Bishop Warburton; who both implicitly adopting, for their sole authority, the edition of Pope, added, to the imperfections of an already faulty copy, a multitude of fresh errors, the result of unbridled conjecture and arrogant conceit.

Had Dr. Johnson, into whose hands the poet was next destined to pass, possessed as much industry as talent, the labours of every subsequent editor, as far as the integrity of the text is concerned, might have been spared. No man, in fact, was better acquainted with the requisites for the task which he undertook than this celebrated moralist and philologer, as the scheme of a new edition of the poet which he published in 1756, nine years anterior to the appearance of his editorial labours, fully evinces. But alas! when this long-promised edition came forth, it was but too evident that he wanted the perseverance and research to carry his own well-conceived plan into execution. We can, however, with grateful pleasure record that, imperfect as his labours were, he not only greatly surpassed his predecessors, but first pointed out the path which

led succeeding commentators to more successful results.

It must not be forgotten that a plan for illustrating Shakspeare similar to that which Dr. Johnson had sketched and partially pursued, had been long carrying on by one of his contemporaries, though not announced to the public until three years after the Doctor's edition. As early, indeed, as the year 1745, Johnson, shocked at the lawless licence of Hanmer's plan, affixed to some strictures on the baronet's edition, brief proposals for a new impression of the bard; and a like feeling of indignation operating simultaneously on the mind of Capell, this gentleman employed not less than six and thirty years in the endeavour to do justice to his favourite poet. Unfortunately for his reputation, the text and the commentary were published separately and at widely-distant periods; the first appearing in 1768, and the latter in 1783, two years after his decease. It might have been expected from the singular industry of Capell, which was almost exhaustless, and the years which he had devoted to collation and transcription,[4] that he would have presented us with a text of great comparative

[4] "Mr. Capell, we are told, spent a whole life on Shakspeare; and if it be true, which we are also told, that he transcribed the works of that illustrious poet ten times with his own hand, it is no breach of charity to add, that much of a life that might have been employed to more valuable purposes, was miserably wasted."—Chalmer's Biographical Dictionary, vol. viii. p. 201.

purity; but he too, notwithstanding the plodding patience of his nature, could not escape the rage for emendation; and the innovations and arbitrary alterations which he introduced into the pages of his author, "amount," says Mr. Malone, who took the pains, by a rigorous examination, to ascertain the fact, "to no less a number than nine hundred and seventy-two."*

If however, as an editor, he failed in one important part of his duty, he had the merit of first carrying another into execution, that of explaining and illustrating Shakspeare through the medium of his contemporaries; for, in the "Introduction" to his edition of the poet, he not only announced his being engaged in drawing up a large body of notes critical and explanatory but that he had prepared and had gotten in great forwardness another work, on which he had been employed for more than twenty years, to be entitled "The School of Shakspeare," consisting wholly of extracts from books familiar to the poet, and unfolding the sources whence he had drawn a large portion of his various knowledge, classical, historical, and romantic. This announcement, which was made fifteen years before the work appeared, had a result which could scarcely have been contemplated by the laborious compiler; for he had been so full and explicit in detailing what he had

* Johnson and Steevens's Shakspeare, apud Reed, 1803. Vol. 16, p. 384.

done, and what he was about to do, that, as a lively memorialist remarks, "while he was diving into the classics of Caxton, and working his way underground, like the river Mole, in order to emerge with all his glories; while he was looking forward to his triumphs; certain other active spirits went to work upon his plan, and digging out the promised treasures, laid them prematurely before the public, defeating the effect of our critic's discoveries by anticipation. Farmer, Steevens, Malone, and a whole host of literary ferrets, burrowed into every hole and corner of the warren of modern antiquity, and overran all the country, whose map had been delineated by Edward Capell."[f]

As Capell, however, was the first efficient explorer of the mine, and led the way to others in a mode of illustration which, when judiciously pursued, has certainly contributed more than any other species of commentary to render the poet better understood, it may not be uninteresting in this place, and before I touch upon the efforts of those who followed in the same track, to give a slight glance at what criticism had been previously doing in the field of annotation. Rowe's edition being without notes, Pope stands foremost in the list of those who accompanied the text with a commentary of any kind: this, however, is nearly limited to conjectural criticism, which he appears to

[f] Chalmers's Biographical Dictionary, vol. viii, p. 200.

have employed without fear or controul, expunging whatever he disliked, and altering whatever he did not understand; and as he was miserably deficient in a knowledge of the language and literature, the manners and customs of the age of Shakspeare, he had, of course, abundant opportunities for the exercise of a fanciful and unrestrained ingenuity. His preface, however, is beautifully written, and in many parts with a just feeling and conception of the character and genius of his great author; but by no means entitled to the lavish encomium of Dr. Johnson, who terms it, as a piece of general criticism, "so extensive that little can be added, and so exact that little can be disputed," praise which the warmest admirer of Pope must now condemn as hyperbolical.

With Theobald, whose sole merit *as a commentator* turns upon minute verbal criticism and a few occasional illustrations from writers contemporary with the poet, commenced that system of ostentation, petty triumph and scurrility, which has so much disgraced the annotators on Shakspeare, and on which, I am sorry to say, it will be necessary very shortly to make some farther strictures.

It is scarcely worth while to mention the notes of Hanmer otherwise than to remark, that they too often betray an equal degree of confidence and want of judgment; his efforts, indeed, appear to have been chiefly directed towards giving the venerable bard a more modern aspect by the most

unauthorised innovations on his language and his metre.

Nor can we estimate the commentary of Warburton at a higher value; it is, in fact, little better than a tissue of the wildest and most licentious conjecture, in which his primary object seems to have been rather the exhibition of his own ingenuity than the elucidation of his author. It excited a transient admiration from the wit and learning which it displayed, though these were misplaced, and then dropped into irretrievable oblivion.

When the mighty mind of Johnson addressed itself to the task of annotation, the expectations of the public were justly raised; much was hoped for, and much certainly was effected, but yet much of what had been anticipated remained undone. One of his greatest deficiencies sprang from his very partial acquaintance with the manners, customs, and superstitions of the age of Elizabeth; nor, indeed, were the predominating features of his intellect, powerful and extraordinary though they were, well associated with those of the poet he had to illustrate; they were too rugged, stern, and inflexible, wanting that plasticity, that comprehensive and imaginative play, which so wonderfully characterized the genius of Shakspeare. This dissimilarity of mental construction is no where more apparent than in the short summaries which he has annexed to the close of each drama, and which are nearly, if not altogether, void of that enthusiasm,

that tasteful yet discriminative warmth of approbation, which it is but natural to suppose the study of such splendid efforts of genius would have generated in any ardent mind. Many of his notes, however, display much acumen in the developement and explanation of intricate and verbally obscure passages; and his preface, though somewhat too elaborate in its diction, and rather too methodically distributive of its praise and blame, is certainly, both as to its style and tone of criticism, one of the noblest compositions in our language.

Perhaps there is not in the annals of literature a more striking contrast than that which obtains between the prefaces of Johnson and Capell, brought into immediate comparison as they were by being published so nearly together; for, whilst the former is remarkable as one of the most splendid and majestic efforts of an author distinguished for the dignity of his composition, the latter is written in a style peculiarly obsolete and almost beyond precedent, bald, disjointed, and uncouth. Capell, however, as I have already observed, had not only the merit of opening, but of entering upon the best mode of illustrating his author; and the frank avowal of his plan led Steevens, who had reprinted, as early as 1766, twenty of the old quarto copies of Shakspeare's plays, to cultivate with equal assiduity and more dispatch the same curious and neglected field. The first fruits of his research into the literature and costume of the age of Shakspeare appeared in his coadjutorship with

Johnson in a new edition of the poet in 1773, in ten volumes octavo. From this period, until his death in 1800, Steevens was incessantly and enthusiastically employed upon his favourite author: a second edition, almost entirely under his revision, appeared in 1778; a third, superintended by Mr. Reed, in 1785; and a fourth, of which, though in the title-page he retained the name of Johnson, he might justly be considered as the independent editor, in 1793. On this last edition, occupying fifteen volumes octavo, and which was subsequently enlarged, by materials which he left behind him, to twenty-one volumes of the same size, and printed under the care of Mr. Reed in 1803, the reputation of Steevens, as an editor and commentator, must entirely rest.

That in the first of these capacities he possessed an uncommon share of industry and perseverance, cannot be denied; for it is recorded that, whilst preparing the edition of 1793, he devoted to it "solely, and exclusively of all other attentions, a period of eighteen months; and during that time he left his house every morning at one o'clock with the Hampstead patrole, and proceeding without any consideration of the weather or the season, called up the compositor, and woke all his devils."[s]

[s] Vide Gentleman's Magazine, vol. 70, p. 178. This article, which appears to have been written by Mr. Burke, closes with the following very impressive and momentous truth; commenting on the acknowledged talents and erudition of Mr. Steevens, he adds: "When Death, by one stroke, and in one moment,

But unfortunately this editorial assiduity, accompanied as it was by great attention to the collation of the oldest copies of his author, was broken in upon and vitiated by his frequent attempts to restore what he conceived wanting to the metrical harmony of the text. He had, in fact, neither heart nor ear for many of the sweetest and most fanciful strains of Shakspeare; and poetry with him being synonymous with accuracy of versification, he hesitated not to adopt many unauthorised readings for the sole purpose of rendering a line mechanically exact; a practice which has, as may well be imagined, very greatly diminished the value of his labours.[h]

As a commentator, Mr. Steevens possessed many of the first requisites for the due execution of his task. He was a man of great learning and eloquence, and, in many instances, of great sagacity

makes such a dispersion of knowledge and intellect—when such a man is carried to his grave—the mind can feel but one emotion: we consider the vanity of every thing beneath the sun,—WE PERCEIVE WHAT SHADOWS WE ARE, AND WHAT SHADOWS WE PURSUE."

[h] "Mr. Steevens," observes Mr. Kemble, "had no ear for the colloquial metre of our old dramatists: it is not possible, on any other supposition, to account for his whimsical desire, and the pains he takes, to fetter the enchanting freedom of Shakspeare's numbers, and compel them into the heroic march and measured cadence of epic versification. The '*native wood-notes wild*,' that could delight the cultivated ear of Milton, must not be modulated anew, to indulge the fastidiousness of those who read verses by their fingers." Macbeth and Richard the Third: An Essay, by J. P. Kemble, p. 101.

and acumen; and, above all, he was most intimately conversant with the language and literature, the manners, customs, and superstitions of the age of Shakspeare. But he had with these and other mental endowments, many counteracting qualities and defects, and such, indeed, as have thrown no little odium on his memory. He had, for instance, both wit and humour in no very measured degree, but neither temper nor mercy to controul them; and he had vivacity of imagination, and great point in expression, without a particle of poetic taste and feeling. From a mind thus constituted, much of illustration, and much also of what is revolting and disgusting, might be expected; and these are, in fact, the characteristics of the commentary of George Steevens, in which, whilst a stream of light is often thrown upon the writings of the poet through the editor's intimacy with the obsolete literature of a former age, there runs through a great part of his annotations a vein of the most unsparing though witty ridicule, often indulged at the expense of those whom he had himself entrapped into error, and of which a principal object seems to have been that of irritating the feelings, and exulting over the supposed sufferings of contemporary candidates for critical fame. Nor was this sportive malignancy the worst feature in the literary conduct of Steevens; there was a pruriency in his imagination which led him to dwell with revolting minuteness on any allusion of his

author, however remote or indirect, to coarse and indelicate subjects; and what adds greatly to the offence, was the endeavour to shield himself from the disgrace which he was conscious of meriting, by annexing to these abominable disquisitions the names of Collins and Amner, the latter belonging to a gentleman of great virtue and piety with whom he had quarrelled, and whose feelings he knew would be agonized by such an attribution.

It is, indeed, a most melancholy consideration, to reflect that some of the worst passions of the human breast, and some of the coarsest language by which literature has been disgraced, are to be found amongst the race of commentators; a class of men who, from the very nature of their pursuit, that of emendatory or laudatory criticism, might be thought exempt from such degrading propensities. In this country more especially has this disgusting exhibition, even to the present day, sullied the labours of the commentators on our elder dramatic poesy; and, above all, is it to be deplored, that Shakspeare, whose character was remarkable for its suavity and benevolence, who has seldom been mentioned, indeed, by his contemporaries without the epithets *gentle* or *beloved* accompanying his name, should have his pages polluted by such a mass of idle contention and vindictive abuse.

Every man of just taste and feeling must be grateful for, and delighted by, the labours of those who are competent to illustrate and explain a

poet so invaluable as Shakspeare, nor could any commentary, with these purposes solely in view, be ever deemed too long or elaborate; but when these critics turn aside from their legitimate object to ridicule, and indeed abuse each other in the grossest manner, to indulge a merciless and malignant triumph over their predecessors or contemporaries, or to bring into broad daylight what common decency requires should be left in its original obscurity, who, whatever may be the wit exhibited in the attempt, but must view such conduct with abhorrence? The enormity, however, carries with it its own punishment, as being indicative of such a temper and such feelings as must necessarily lead those who combat not their influence into wretchedness and self-reproach, and not unfrequently, indeed, into the agonies of despair and the ravings of insanity; consequences which, as partly springing from this source, and partly from religious indifference, have unhappily been exemplified in the closing hours of the witty Steevens and intemperate Ritson; men who, by their caprice or violence, lived without friendship or sympathy, and, owing to their scepticism, died without consolation or hope.[1]

[1] Dr. Dibdin, describing the character of Ritson under the appellation of Sycorax, remarks, "his malice and ill-nature were frightful; and withal, his love of scurrility and abuse quite intolerable. He mistook, in too many instances, the manner for the matter; the shadow for the substance. He passed his criticisms, and dealt out his invectives with so little cere-

From results such as these, which cannot be contemplated without the most painful and humi-

mony and so much venom, that he seemed born with a scalping knife in his hand, to commit murder as long as he lived! To him censure was sweeter than praise; and the more elevated the rank, and respectable the character of his antagonist, the more dexterously he aimed his blows, and the more frequently he renewed his attacks."—Bibliomania, p. 9.

A temper such as this, uncontrolled as it was by any restrictive influence from revealed religion, terminated in what might have been anticipated, a loss of reason from the indulgence of unrestrained passion; and he expired in a receptacle for insane persons, at Hoxton, Sept. 3d, 1803!

I sincerely wish a more consolatory account could be given of the closing hours of the witty and accomplished Steevens; but the same writer has furnished us with such an awful yet, at the same time, highly monitory description of his departure, as cannot fail to read a lesson of the very first importance to every human being. "The latter moments," he says, "of STEEVENS were moments of mental anguish. He grew not only irritable, but outrageous; and, in full possession of his faculties, he raved in a manner which could have been expected only from a creature bred up without notions of morality or religion. Neither complacency nor 'joyful hope' soothed his bed of death. His language was, too frequently, the language of imprecation; and his wishes and apprehensions such as no rational Christian can think upon without agony of heart. Although I am not disposed to admit the whole of the testimony of the good woman who watched by his bed-side, and paid him, when dead, the last melancholy attentions of her office—although my prejudices (as they may be called) will not allow me to believe that the windows shook, and that strange noises and deep groans were heard at midnight in his room—yet no creature of common sense (and this woman possessed the quality in an eminent degree) could mistake oaths for prayers,

liating emotions, I now turn with pleasure to the last great editor of Shakspeare, Mr. Malone, who, though not possessing a particle of the wit and humour of Steevens, was his equal in point of general knowledge and Shakspearian lore. Steevens had early discovered and appreciated the editorial acumen and patient research of Malone, and an intimacy, at first very cordial, took place between them, the former trusting to avail himself of the talents of his new friend in the capacity of an humble and very useful coadjutor. When the latter, however, relying on his own resources, ventured to publish, in 1780, a Supplement to the edition of 1778, Steevens felt piqued and alarmed, sensations which arose even to enmity on Malone's intimating his intention of bringing forth a new and entirely independent edition of the bard; a design which the elder commentator thus mentions with no little poignancy and humour in a letter to Mr. Warton, in April 1783: "Whatever the vege-

or boisterous treatment for calm and gentle usage. If it be said—why

'draw his frailties from their dread abode?'

the answer is obvious, and, I should hope, irrefragable. A duty, and a sacred one too, is due TO THE LIVING. Past examples operate upon future ones; and posterity ought to know, in the instance of this accomplished scholar and literary antiquary, that neither the sharpest wit, nor the most delicate intellectual refinement, can, alone, afford a man 'PEACE AT THE LAST.' The vessel of human existence must be secured by other anchors than these, when the storm of death approaches!"—Bibliomania, p. 589.

table spring may produce," he observes, "the critical one will be prolific enough. No less than six editions of Shakspeare (including Capell's notes, with Collins's prolegomena) are now in the mash-tub. I have thrown up my licence. Reed is to occupy the old red lattice, and Malone intends to froth and lime at a little snug booth of his own construction. Ritson will advertise sour ale against his mild."[1]

Little, it is evident, was now wanting to establish a complete breach between these rival annotators, and this little occurred very shortly afterwards; for Malone having contributed some notes to the edition of Shakspeare published, in 1785, under the superintendence of Reed, in which he occasionally opposed the *dicta* of Steevens, the latter demanded that these notes should be republished verbatim in the promised edition of Malone, that he might have an opportunity of answering them as they were originally written; a proposal, which on Malone's indignantly refusing to listen to, an open rupture, as to Shakspeare, took place between them; and when the edition of Malone came forth in 1790, Steevens angrily commenced his threatened task, the result appearing in his own re-impression of the bard in 1793; in which, whilst he availed himself of the labours of his rival, he ungenerously affected to treat his opinions with ridicule and contempt.

[1] Wooll's Biographical Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Warton, D.D. p. 398.

The edition of Malone, however, which in ten volumes octavo included as well the poems as the plays of Shakspeare, was so well received by the public as to induce its editor to devote almost the entire remainder of his days to its revision and improvement; and in 1821, nine years after his death, it re-appeared in twenty-one volumes octavo, under the care and arrangement of Mr. Boswell, to whom the materials thus industriously accumulated by the deceased critic had been very happily consigned.

As an editor of Shakspeare, Mr. Malone may be justly considered as in many respects superior to his predecessors. Not one of them, in fact, had attempted the task without, in a greater or less degree, neglecting or tampering with the original text; whilst Malone, by the scrupulous fidelity with which he adhered to the elder copies, whether quarto or first folio, never adopting a reading unsanctioned by their authority, unless where an absolute want of intelligibility from typographical carelessness compelled him to do so, and then never without due notice, presented us, for the first time, with as perfect a transcript of the words of Shakspeare as can now probably be obtained.

Nor are his powers as a commentator, though he has little pretension to the intellectual vivacity of Steevens, to be lightly estimated. His notes, though somewhat dry and verbose, are full of information; his History of the Stage is singularly

elaborate and exact; and Mr. Boswell assures us that "Professor Porson, who was by no means in the habit of bestowing hasty or thoughtless praise, declared to him that he considered the Essay on the three parts of Henry the Sixth as one of the most convincing pieces of criticism that he had ever read; nor," he adds, "was Mr. Burke less liberal in his praises."[k]

The chief, and perhaps the only prominent fault of Malone as an illustrator of Shakspeare, has arisen from his too anxious efforts to pour out all he had acquired on each subject without due reference to its greater or minor importance; a want of discrimination which has not unfrequently rendered him heavy and tedious. It is, indeed, devoutly to be wished that an edition of Shakspeare were undertaken, which, whilst in the notes it expunged all that was trifling, idly-controversial, indecorous, and abusive, should, at the same time, retain every interesting disquisition, though in many instances re-modelled, re-written, and condensed; nor fearing to add what farther research under the guidance of taste might suggest. In bulk, such an edition might not be less than what has appeared so formidable in the impressions of Steevens and Malone, but the commentary would assume a very different aspect.[l]

[k] Chalmers's Biographical Dictionary, vol. xxi. p. 207.

[l] I consider the specimen of an edition of Shakspeare given to the public by Mr. Caldecott in 1819, as approaching very nearly this description, and I rather wonder sufficient encou-

After this cursory account of the chief editors of Shakspeare, I have now to turn to that branch of

ragement has not been afforded Mr. Caldecott for the prosecution of his design. The volume is entitled "Hamlet and As You Like It. A Specimen of a new Edition of Shakspeare." London: John Murray.—The principle on which the work is constructed is thus explained by the editor: "The first folio is made the groundwork of the proposed edition and present specimen, in which also will be admitted such additional matter as has occurred in the twenty quartos published by Mr. Steevens.—Wherever the reading of the folio is departed from, the folio text is given in its place on the margin; but unless any thing turns upon the old spelling, in which case it is retained in the text, the modern spelling is throughout adopted; and the punctuation is altogether taken into the editor's hands. Wherever also such alterations as appear material are found in the folio 1632, they are noticed in the margin.—Not to interpose any thing of length between the author and his reader, we have thought it proper to throw the notes that are grammatical, philological, critical, historical, or explanatory of usages, to the end of each play; and at the bottom of the pages of the text, to give such only as were immediately necessary to explain our author's meaning.—We have made no comments but where we have felt doubt ourselves, or seen that others have; and we have suffered nothing like difficulty to pass without offering our conjecture at least, or acknowledging our inability to remove it."—Advertisement to the Reader, pp. vii—x.

The only alteration which I should wish to see made in this plan, would be to have the *whole* of the notes immediately connected with the text instead of the larger portion of them thrown, as is now the case, to the end of each play. I am persuaded, indeed, that the trouble occasioned by the necessity of almost perpetually turning from one part of a book to another, would with many persons prove an insuperable bar to the consultation of any commentary. May not a feeling by the public of the inconveniency of this arrangement, have in some degree operated to arrest the completion of the editor's labours?

my subject which includes the DETACHED PUBLICATIONS EXCLUSIVELY APPROPRIATED to the poet, and which, as opening a field of great extent and no little intricacy, I shall, for the sake of perspicuity, arrange under the three heads of *controversial*, *annotative*, and *dissertative* criticism, passing, however, as lightly and rapidly over the ground occupied by my first division as possible, presenting as it does, with occasional illustrations of some value, so much of what is vindictive, trivial, or repulsive.

The arena opens most inauspiciously with the controversy of Rymer, Gildon, and Dennis, on the merits and demerits of the bard, three men as little calculated by their temper, taste, and talents, to do justice to the subject as could well be enumerated. This was followed by the attack of Theobald on Pope under the title of "Shakspeare Restored," and by the war-hoop which was not unjustly raised against the dogmatism and supercilious arrogance of Warburton, by Grey, Edwards, Holt, Nichols, and Heath; a pentarchy displaying no small portion of wit, humour, and sarcastic keenness. The irony of Edwards, indeed, was conducted in his "Canons of Criticism" with uncommon skill and point, forming, in its tone and manner, a striking contrast to the bitter and vehement spirit of Heath; whilst the pamphlet of Mr. Holt points out in its very title-page what may be considered, notwithstanding the subsequent host of commentators and critics, as yet to be successfully achieved

for the fame of Shakspeare; namely, "to rescue that aunciente English Poet and Play-wrighte Maister William Shakspeare from the many Errours faulsely charged on him by certaine new-fangled Wittes; and to let him speak for himselfe, as right well he wotteth, when freede from the many careless Mistakings of the heedless first Imprinters of his Workes."

Nor were the three great editors of Shakspeare, Johnson, Steevens, and Malone, more fortunate than their predecessors, Pope and Warburton had been, in escaping the ebullitions of spleen and malignity. From the coarse and bitter invective of Kenrick however, unaccompanied as it was by any superior talent, Johnson had nothing to apprehend, and he disdained to reply; but his coadjutor Steevens, and the indefatigable Malone, had to meet and to parry the keen and envenomed arrows of Ritson, a man certainly of considerable sagacity and very minute accuracy, but whose unhappy and uncontrolled temper led him, as I have before remarked, into the most indecorous and merciless abuse.

Nor was this the only opponent whose talents were of a formidable kind, that Mr. Malone had to contend with. One of the most singular and daring attempts at imposition in the literary world perhaps on record, brought him into contact with Mr. George Chalmers, a critic and antiquary of much acuteness and penetration, and as industrious as himself. I allude to the pretended Shakspeare

Manuscripts published by the Irelands in 1795, a forgery by the younger of these gentlemen, which engaged much of the public attention for three or four years, and furnishes not less than *nineteen* articles in the last and most complete list of Detached Publications relative to the poet. Gross and despicable, however, as was the fraud, it had the incidental merit of eliciting much curious information on the history, costume, and manners of the Elizabethan era; nor can the "Inquiry" of Mr. Malone, the chief detector of the imposition, or the "Apologies for the Believers" by Mr. Chalmers, be read without feeling respect for the skill, ingenuity, and unwearied patience with which these laborious critics carried on their researches.

Retreating, however, from the thorny paths of controversy, I pass on to take a brief notice of those who, either as *annotators* or *glossographers*, have endeavoured, by occasional *separate* works, to illustrate and explain our bard. Grey and Heath, who have already been mentioned as the oppugnors of Warburton, possess great acumen in this department; the former especially, as contesting perhaps with Capell the merit of first pursuing the plan of illustrating Shakspeare through the medium of contemporary usage and literature. Previously, though with inferior tact, had appeared the Notes, Observations, and Remarks of Peck, Upton, and Whalley, commentators with whom, if we set aside the classical erudition of Upton, may be arranged, as of approximating worth, the names of Davies,

Chedworth, Seymour, and Jackson; the latter, however, being entitled to peculiar notice, as having thrown fresh light on the state of the early impressions of Shakspeare from a skilful application of his professional knowledge as a typographer, tracing to their source, and correcting several errors which had originated solely from the incorrectness of the printer.[m]

There are not wanting, moreover, in this branch of Detached Publications on Shakspeare, some names of first-rate celebrity as annotators; for instance, those of Tyrwhitt, Monk Mason, Whiter,[n] and Douce, the last gentleman in particular

[m] The work of Mr. Jackson is entitled, "Shakspeare's Genius Justified; being Restorations and Illustrations of Seven Hundred Passages in Shakspeare's Plays," 8vo. 1819. If it must be granted that Mr. Jackson has occasionally allowed himself to imagine more blunders than ever really sprang from the source he contends for, he has yet most assuredly detected, in frequent instances, errors evidently arising from the ignorance or carelessness of the printer, and consequently many of his emendations must be pronounced at once striking and correct.

[n] Mr. Whiter's production, which is entitled "A Specimen of a Commentary on Shakspeare," consists of two parts. 1. "Notes on As You Like It. 2. An Attempt to explain and illustrate various passages on a New Principle of Criticism, derived from Mr. Locke's Doctrine of the Association of Ideas."

This second part, which, as the author tells us, is "an endeavour to unfold the secret and subtile operations of genius from the most indubitable doctrine in the theory of metaphysics," exhibits a most ingenious, and, not seldom, a very convincing train of reasoning and illustration, though the basis on which it is built cannot but occasionally throw open the most cautious commentator to the delusions of imagination.

having, in his *Illustrations of Shakspeare and of Ancient Manners*, exhibited, in the form of notes and occasional disquisitions, an almost unparalleled wide range of research with a fulness of information, a richness of recondite lore, and an urbanity of manner, which are truly delightful.

I shall close this section with the mention of the highly useful, and, in one instance truly interesting, labours of the glossographers on Shakspeare. The Indices of Ascough and Twiss are copious and correct, and can scarcely be dispensed with by those who wish to study Shakspeare with philological accuracy; whilst the "Glossary" of Archdeacon Nares, adapted not only to the works of our great dramatic bard, but to those of his contemporaries, superadds to the verbal wealth of a dictionary a vast fund of the most entertaining and instructive illustration in relation to the manners, customs, and superstitions of the reigns of Elizabeth and James. It is a work, indeed, which will ever be considered as a necessary companion to the study of the poetical and miscellaneous literature of these periods, and may be deemed, with respect to Shakspeare, as superseding much of the commentary which now so frequently, and often so inconveniently, loads the pages of our favourite author.

The last division of Detached Publications exclusively appropriated to our poet, comprehends, according to the arrangement which I have adopted, that species of criticism which, from its continuity

and style, may be termed the *Dissertative*, and which, if not more useful than a well-conducted series of annotation, is, at least, from the extensive field it is capable of embracing, biographical, historical, moral, and philosophical, and the scope which it yields to ingenuity and talent, calculated to be much more pleasing and interesting.

It has accordingly been productive of a large portion of valuable disquisition, and one of the earliest attempts in the department will bear ample testimony to the truth of the affirmation, namely, the "Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare" by the Rev. Dr. Farmer; a work which, from the perspicuity of its arrangement, the liveliness of its style, and the strength and adroit application of the evidence it adduces, has nearly set the question at rest; though it must be allowed, I think, that he has carried his depreciation of the scholarship of the poet somewhat too far.

This was speedily followed by the celebrated "Essay" of Mrs. Montagu, "on the Writings and Genius of Shakspeare, compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets," and including a very satisfactory defence of the bard against the misrepresentations of Voltaire; a production which, notwithstanding the sneers of Dr. Johnson,* is justly

* Vide Boswell's Life of Johnson, vol. 2. p. 82. As a counterpoise to these sneers, the opinion of Cowper, a very competent judge, may be satisfactorily quoted. Speaking of her "Essay" to a correspondent, he says: "the learning, the good sense, the sound judgment, and the wit displayed in it, fully

entitled to all the praise that has been bestowed upon it. The section, in particular, on the "Præternatural Beings" of our Dramatist, is written not only with great taste, but with great powers of eloquence, and great beauty of expression.

Passing over two or three publications of little moment, our attention becomes fixed by Professor Richardson's "Essays on Shakspeare's Dramatic Characters." Of these the first portion was published in 1774, a second in 1784, and a third in 1788; and the whole were re-printed together in 1797, and again with additions in 1812. The characters commented on are those of Macbeth, Hamlet, Jaques, Imogen, Richard the Third, Falstaff, King Lear, Timon of Athens, and Fluellen. To which are added, "Essays on Shakspeare's Imitation of Female Characters;" "On the Faults of Shakspeare;" "On the chief Objects of Criticism in the Works of Shakspeare;" and "On Shakspeare's Representation of National Characters."

This work, written in that spirit of philosophical criticism for which our northern neighbours are so justly celebrated, is a well-executed attempt to unfold the ruling principles which appear to bias and govern the mind and actions of the principal characters in the dramas of Shakspeare, and to demonstrate that they are in strict conformity with

justify not only my compliment, but all compliments that either have been already paid to her talents, or shall be paid hereafter."—Hayley's Life of Cowper.

the laws and constitution of our nature, and, consequently, not only most striking proofs of the consummate skill of the poet, but admirable lessons of moral truth and wisdom. The very ingenious and satisfactory manner in which the critic has thus endeavoured to prove poetry one of the best teachers of philosophy, is entitled to high praise, and has been adequately acknowledged by the public.

About three years after Professor Richardson's first publication, appeared Mr. Maurice Morgan's "Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff," in which, with singular eloquence and ingenuity, he strives to convince his readers that Shakspeare did not intend to represent the jocular knight as a coward. The experiment, however, for such he confesses it to be, was too paradoxical to succeed; but the work in which it was made had higher and more important objects in view, and includes not only the character of Falstaff, but aims at the developement of the art and genius of Shakspeare, and, through him, of the principles of human nature itself.

Whilst, therefore, we cannot but retain our former opinions as to the courage of Sir John, and must continue to exclaim, in reference to this point,

"A plague on all cowards still,"

yet such are the taste, talents, and brilliancy of expression poured out upon the digressionary topics just mentioned, as to render the little volume which includes them one of the most interesting

to which the fertile subject of Shakspeare has given birth.

There is, indeed, in this production of Mr. Morgan so much profundity of remark, and occasionally so much beautifully expressed enthusiasm, that I am irresistibly induced, in this *one* instance, to deviate from the plan laid down; and although taken from a detached publication expressly on the poet, to insert here, as a precursory portrait to those given in the subsequent part of my volume, what this ingenious critic has said with such philosophical acuteness on the masterly formation of Shakspeare's characters, and with such tasteful fervor on the bard himself, and on the peculiar structure of his genius.

"The reader must be sensible," he remarks, "of something in the composition of Shakspeare's characters, which renders them essentially different from those drawn by other writers. The characters of every drama must, indeed, be grouped; but in the groupes of other poets, the parts which are not seen do not in fact exist. But there is a certain roundness and integrity in the forms of Shakspeare, which give them an independence as well as a relation, insomuch that we often meet with passages which, though perfectly felt, cannot be sufficiently explained in words without unfolding the whole character of the speaker.

"Bodies of all kinds, whether of metals, plants, or animals, are supposed to possess certain first principles of *being*, and to have an existence in-

dependent of the accidents which form their magnitude or growth. These accidents are supposed to be drawn in from the surrounding elements, but not indiscriminately; each plant and each animal imbibes those things only which are proper to its own distinct nature, and which have besides such a secret relation to each other, as to be capable of forming a perfect union and coalescence: but so variously are the surrounding elements mingled and disposed, that each particular body even of those under the same species, has yet some *peculiar* of its own. Shakspeare appears to have considered the being and growth of the human mind as analogous to this system. There are certain qualities and capacities which he seems to have considered as first principles; the chief of which are certain energies of courage and activity, according to their degrees; together with different degrees and sorts of sensibilities, and a capacity, varying likewise in the *degree* of discernment and intelligence. The rest of the composition is drawn from an atmosphere of surrounding things; that is, from the various influences of the different laws, religions, and governments in the world, and from those of the different ranks and inequalities in society, and from the different professions of men, encouraging or repressing passions of particular sorts, and inducing different modes of thinking and habits of life; and he seems to have known intuitively what those influences in particular were which this or that original con-

stitution would most freely imbibe, and which would most easily associate and coalesce. But all these things being, in different situations, very differently disposed, and these differences exactly discerned by him, he found no difficulty in marking every individual, even among characters of the same sort, with something peculiar and distinct. Climate and complexion demand their influence; '*Be this when thou art dead, and I will kill thee, and love thee after*,' is a sentiment characteristic of, and fit only to be uttered by a *Moor*.

"But it was not enough for Shakspeare to have formed his characters with the most perfect truth and coherence; it was farther necessary that he should possess a wonderful facility of compressing, as it were, his own spirit into these images, and of giving alternate animation to the forms. This was not to be done *from without;* he must have *felt* every varied situation, and have spoken through the organ he had formed. Such an intuitive comprehension of things, and such a facility, must unite to produce a Shakspeare. The reader will not now be surprised if I affirm that those characters in Shakspeare, which are seen only in part, are yet capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole; every part being in fact relative, and inferring all the rest. It is true that the point of action or sentiment which we are most concerned in, is always held out for our special notice. But who does not perceive that there is a peculiarity about it, which conveys a relish of the whole? And

very frequently, when no particular point presses, he boldly makes a character act and speak from those parts of the composition which are *inferred* only, and not distinctly shown. This produces a wonderful effect; it seems to carry us beyond the poet to nature itself, and gives an integrity and truth to facts and character, which they could not otherwise obtain. And this is in reality that art in Shakspeare, which, being withdrawn from our notice, we more emphatically call *nature*. A felt propriety and truth from causes unseen, I take to be the highest point of poetic composition. If the characters of Shakspeare are thus *whole*, and, as it were, original, while those of almost all other writers are mere imitation, it may be fit to consider them rather as historic than dramatic beings; and, when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the *whole* of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.

"Shakspeare differs essentially, indeed, from all other writers: him we may profess rather to feel than to understand; and it is safer to say, on many occasions, that we are possessed by him, than that we possess him. And no wonder;—he scatters the seeds of things, the principles of character and action, with so cunning a hand, yet with so careless an air, and, master of our feelings, submits himself so little to our judgment, that every thing seems superior. We discern not his course; we see no connection of cause and effect; we are rapt in

ignorant admiration; and claim no kindred with his abilities. All the incidents, all the parts, look like chance, whilst we feel and are sensible that the whole is design. His characters not only act and speak in strict conformity to nature, but in strict relation to us; just so much is shown as is requisite, just so much is impressed: he commands every passage to our heads and to our hearts, and moulds us as he pleases, and that with so much ease, that he never betrays his own exertions. We see these characters act from the mingled motives of passion, reason, interest, habit, and complection, in all their proportions, when they are supposed to know it not themselves; and we are made to acknowledge that their actions and sentiments are, from these motives, the necessary result. He at once blends and distinguishes every thing;—every thing is complicated, every thing is plain. I restrain the farther expressions of my admiration lest they should not seem applicable to man; but it is really astonishing that a mere human being, a part of humanity only, should so perfectly comprehend the whole; and that he should possess such exquisite art, that, whilst every woman and every child shall feel the whole effect, his learned Editors and Commentators should yet so very frequently mistake or seem ignorant of the cause. A sceptre or a straw are, in his hands, of equal efficacy; he needs no selection; he converts every thing into excellence; nothing is too great, nothing is too base. Is a character efficient like *Richard,*

it is every thing we can wish; is it otherwise, like *Hamlet*, it is productive of equal admiration. Action produces one mode of excellence, and inaction another: the chronicle, the novel, or the ballad; the king or the beggar; the hero, the madman, the sot or the fool; it is all one;—nothing is worse, nothing is better: the same genius pervades and is equally admirable in all. Or, is a character to be shown in progressive change, and the events of years comprised within the hour;—with what a magic hand does he prepare and scatter his spells! The understanding must, in the first place, be subdued; and lo! how the rooted prejudices of the child spring up to confound the man! The Weird Sisters rise, and order is extinguished. The laws of nature give way, and leave nothing in our minds but wildness and horror. No pause is allowed us for reflection. Horrid sentiment, furious guilt and compunction, air-drawn daggers, murders, ghosts, and inchantment, shake and 'possess us wholly.' In the meantime the *process* is completed. Macbeth changes under our eye, 'the milk of human kindness is converted to gall;' 'he has supped full of horrors,' and his 'May of life is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf;' whilst we, the fools of amazement, are insensible to the shifting of place and the lapse of time, and, till the curtain drops, never once wake to the truth of things, or recognize the laws of existence. On such an occasion, a fellow like *Rymer*, waking from his trance, shall lift up his constable's

staff, and charge this great magician, this daring 'practicer of arts inhibited,' in the name of *Aristotle*, to surrender; whilst *Aristotle* himself, disowning his wretched officer, would fall prostrate at his feet, and acknowledge his supremacy.—O supreme of dramatic excellence! (might he say,) not to me be imputed the insolence of fools. The bards of *Greece* were confined within the narrow circle of the chorus, and hence they found themselves constrained to practise, for the most part, the precision, and copy the details of nature. I followed them, and knew not that a larger circle might be drawn, and the drama extended to the whole reach of human genius. Convinced, I see that a more compendious *nature* may be obtained; a nature of *effects* only, to which neither the relations of place, nor continuity of time, are always essential. Nature, condescending to the faculties and apprehensions of man, has drawn through human life a regular chain of visible causes and effects; but poetry delights in surprise, conceals her steps, seizes at once upon the heart, and obtains the sublime of things without betraying the rounds of her ascent: true poesy is *magic*, not *nature;* an effect from causes hidden or unknown. To the Magician I prescribed no laws; his law and his power are one; his power is his law. Him, who neither imitates, nor is within the reach of imitation, no precedent can or ought to bind, no limits to contain. If his end be obtained, who shall question his

course? Means, whether apparent or hidden, are justified in poesy by success; but then most perfect and most admirable when most concealed."[p]

After quoting this passage, which rivals in its tone and manner what has since been so eloquently expressed by Schlegel and other German critics on the character of Shakspeare, and which seemed to me so analogous to the primary object of my volume as to warrant its insertion here as a prefatory portrait, I proceed to notice, though necessarily very briefly, those who have since contributed to enrich this pleasing province of Shakspearian criticism.

In 1785 were printed some ingenious remarks on the characters of Richard the Third and Macbeth, written by Mr. Whately, and controverted the succeeding year by the celebrated actor John Philip Kemble under the title of "Macbeth Reconsidered;" the former attributing the scruples and remorse of Macbeth to constitutional timidity, and the latter denying the charge. Nearly at the same time appeared the Rev. Martin Sherlock's "Fragment on Shakspeare, extracted from Advice to a young Poet;" a little work originally written by the author in Italian, with the view of counteracting on the continent the prejudices so widely circulated against our great bard by Voltaire. The Fragment on Shakspeare was soon translated into French, and from French into English, and cer-

[p] Pages 58 ad 62, and 66 ad 71.

tainly, though written in a peculiar warmth of style, displays a correct estimate of the powers of a poet whom, to adopt the language of Mr. Sherlock, Nature made, and then *broke the mould.*

In the course of the two succeeding years, 1787 and 1788, Mr. Felton presented the public with his "Imperfect Hints towards a new Edition of Shakspeare;" a work written chiefly in the year 1782, with the object of recommending and furnishing instructions for a splendid and highly embellished edition of the poet; and brought forward at a period when Boydell's magnificent Shakspeare was in preparation, and in the hope of contributing some useful hints towards that national undertaking.

Mr. Felton has displayed in this production a very intimate acquaintance with all that has been effected for the Bard of Avon, through the medium of the painter and engraver, from the first prints connected with the page of Shakspeare in the edition by Rowe in 1709, to the era of the noble picture-gallery in Pall Mall. It is, indeed, a work of considerable interest, written with great judgment and knowledge of the various branches of the art of design, and with a deep and enthusiastic feeling for the beauties of the admirable poet whom its author is so anxious to illustrate. That the strictures of Mr. Felton have contributed towards promoting a correct taste and increased love for graphic embellishment, as connected with the dramas of Shakspeare, there can be little doubt; and how gratifying is it to reflect on the splendid

homage which, during the last forty years, has been paid to the genius of our immortal bard by the pencils of the most accomplished of our artists, by such men as Reynolds, West, Romney, Fuseli, and Smirke!

The next publication in this department, which, from the novelty of its object, has a claim to our attention, proceeds from the pen of the Rev. James Plumptre, M. A., who, in the year 1796, printed "Observations on Hamlet, and on the Motives which most probably induced Shakspeare to fix upon the Story of Amleth, from the Danish Chronicle of Saxo Grammaticus, for the Plot of that Tragedy. Being an Attempt to prove that he designed it as an indirect Censure on Mary Queen of Scots." This was followed the succeeding year by an Appendix, containing some farther arguments in support of the hypothesis. Much ingenuity and research, and perhaps some play of fancy, have been exhibited by the author of these pamphlets in maintaining the fresh ground on which he has ventured to take his stand; and it will, I think, be allowed that, notwithstanding several assaults, and some of them powerful ones, have been brought against his position, he has by no means been compelled to relinquish it. Indeed I have some reason to believe that he meditates by additional proofs a farther corroboration of his opinion, assuredly not lightly assumed, nor illogically supported.[q]

[q] The editor has much pleasure in placing before his readers the following summary of the age of Shakspeare from the pen of the very ingenious author of these pamphlets, viz.:

Chalmers, and others, of Ben Jonson's Enmity, &c. towards Shakspeare;" a little work, which has

A. D.

1586. Oct. 19th. Trial of Mary.
— 25th. Her sentence.
Dec. 6th. Her sentence published.

87. Feb. 1st. Her warrant signed.
— 7th. Tuesday. Earls of Shrewsbury and Kent arrive.
— 8th. Mary beheaded.

89. Nov. The Privy Council appoint assessors with the master of the revels.
Nov. 24th. James VI. (1st of England) married to the Princess Anne of Denmark.
The Old Play of Hamlet, by Kydd, written before this.

90. First three books of the Fairy Queen published.
PERICLES written, ***Shakspeare's first play.***

90-1. Feb. Pension of 50*l.* per annum granted to Spenser. by Queen Elizabeth.

91. COMEDY OF ERRORS written.
LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST written.

92. HENRY VI., PART 1st, (or 2d, according to the common enumeration) written.
———— PART 2d (or 3d, according to the common enumeration) written.

93. MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM written.
ROMEO AND JULIET written.
Venus and Adonis published. Written probably between 1587 and 1590. Dedicated to Lord Southampton.

94. TAMING OF THE SHREW written.
Rape of Lucrece published. Dedicated to Lord Southampton.

95. TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA written.
RICHARD THE THIRD written.
Spenser's Amoretti, addressed to Elizabeth, published.

completely manifested, in opposition to many idle and malevolent suggestions, the cordial and unin-

A. D.

1596. RICHARD THE SECOND written.
HENRY THE FOURTH, Parts 1st and 2d written.
Second Three Books of Spenser's Fairy Queen published.

97. MERCHANT OF VENICE written.
HAMLET written.

98. KING JOHN written.
ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL written.

99. Jan. 16th. Spenser died.
HENRY THE FIFTH written.
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING written.
Shakspeare's *Passionate Pilgrim* surreptitiously published.
Nov. Players, and probably Shakspeare, at Edinburgh.

1600. AS YOU LIKE IT written.
Aug. 5th. Gowrie's Conspiracy against James.

1. MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR written.
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA written.
Earl of Essex's Rebellion. Richard II. acted. Prosecution of Essex conducted by Coke, Attorney-General, with uncommon severity.

2. KING HENRY THE EIGHTH written.
TIMON OF ATHENS written.

3. MEASURE FOR MEASURE written.
March 24th, Thursday. Queen Elizabeth died.
May 7th. James I. entered London.
May 19th. James granted a licence to Shakspeare, &c.
First Edition of Hamlet published.
Shakspeare gave up acting about this time.
Club at the Mermaid flourished.

4. KING LEAR written.
Second Edition of Hamlet published, and enlarged to almost as much again.
Dec. 4th. Tragedy of Gowry acted.

terrupted friendship which ever existed between these two celebrated contemporaries.[r]

In 1812, Mr. Capel Lofft published a thick duodecimo volume under the title of "Aphorisms from Shakspeare," with a Preface and Notes. An

A. D.

1605. CYMBELINE written.
6. MACBETH written.
7. JULIUS CÆSAR written.
8. ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA written.
Black Letter Historie of Hamblet published, said by Mr. Malone to be a republication, but I see no reason for the supposition.
9. CORIOLANUS written.
Shakspeare's *Sonnets* and *Lover's Complaint* published.
10. WINTER'S TALE said to have been written, but the date very doubtful.
11. THE TEMPEST written.
12. OTHELLO written.
13. TWELFTH NIGHT written, *Shakspeare's last play*.
March 10th. Shakspeare purchased a tenement in Blackfriars.
Shakspeare quitted London. Retired to Stratford.
14. July 9th. Fire at Stratford.
16. Feb. 25th. Shakspeare's Will drawn up.
March 25th.———— signed.
April 23d, Tuesday. Shakspeare died, aged 52.

The Editor has only to remark that the order and relation of many of the events in the above Chronological Table by Mr. Plumptre, tend much to strengthen the hypothesis which this gentleman has endeavoured, with so much patient research, to substantiate.

[r] The same side of the question has been taken by Mr. Gifford in his "Life of Ben Johnson," and by the Editor of this work in his "Noontide Leisure."—See his "Tale of the Days of Shakspeare."

attempt to collect the moral wisdom of Shakspeare had been previously made by Mrs. Griffiths, whose "Morality of Shakspeare's Drama illustrated," appeared in an octavo volume in 1775. Mr. Lofft, however, has taken a wider range, and by condensing his materials into the form of brief maxims, has rendered his work a more convenient yet comprehensive manual for the purposes of daily life. It is a volume of which, towards the close of his Introduction, the compiler has justly observed: "I know not how to imagine that any one should rise from its perusal without still higher thoughts of Shakspeare than they brought with them when they sate down; some accession of intellectual strength; improvement in the conduct of life; a more lively sense of the beauty of virtue, and of all the relative offices and affections which cement and adorn society, constituting individual happiness and public welfare. I know not any professed system of *ethics* from which they could have been extracted more copiously, more perspicuously and correctly, or, by the influence of their form and manner, so impressively."[a]

There is a passage in the Poetaster of Ben Jonson, acted in 1601, so admirably and minutely descriptive of this aphoristic wealth in our great dramatist, and of its applicability to the business and bosom of every human being, as to induce the conviction that, though ostensibly predicated of Virgil, it was covertly meant as a faithful picture of

[a] Introduction, p. xxvi.

the poetry of the author's beloved friend and patron, his admired Shakspeare, several of whose best plays had been brought forward anterior to the appearance of the Poetaster.

> ——————— That which he hath writ
> Is with such judgment labor'd and distill'd
> Through all the needful uses of our life,
> That could a man remember but his lines,
> He should not touch on any serious point
> But he might breathe his spirit out of him.—
> His learning savours not the school-like gloss
> That most consists in echoing words and terms,
> And soonest wins a man an empty name;
> Nor any long or far-fetch'd circumstance;—
> But a direct and analytic sum
> Of all the worth and first effects of arts:
> And for his poesy, 'tis so ramm'd with *life*,
> That it shall gather strength of life with being,
> And live hereafter more admir'd than now.[1]

Next to the history of the individual who, by his actions or his writings, has contributed to the moral and intellectual improvement of his species, there is implanted in the human breast a natural desire to be made acquainted with what had been his aspect and his features, and in no instance has this been more powerfully felt than in relation to Shakspeare; yet, from among the numerous efforts which have been made to gratify this inclination as to the person of our bard, there are but two or three which have any pretensions to consideration, and of these the bust at Stratford seems entitled to the

[1] Poetaster, Act. v. Scene 1st.

foremost place. On this interesting relique, which had hitherto not been adequately estimated, there appeared, in the year 1816, some very ingenious observations from the pen of one of the most accomplished antiquaries of the present day. This little brochure, entitled "Remarks on the Monumental Bust of Shakspeare, at Stratford-upon-Avon, by J. Britton, F. S. A.," had the merit of recalling and fixing the attention of the public on certainly a most pleasing and highly authenticated representation of the poet; a representation which has since furnished frequent employment both for the pen of the critic, and the burine of the engraver.

The subsequent year produced a work in relation to our dramatist on a very comprehensive scale, as will be immediately perceived from its title, which runs thus: "Shakspeare and his Times: including the Biography of the Poet; Criticisms on his Genius and Writings; a New Chronology of his Plays; a Disquisition on the Object of his Sonnets, and a History of the Manners, Customs, and Amusements, Superstitions, Poetry, and Elegant Literature of his age. By Nathan Drake, M. D." Two volumes 4to.

As a farther illustration of the plan on which these volumes are constructed, the following extract from the author's preface may prove perhaps acceptable:—

"Though two centuries," he observes, "have now elapsed since the death of Shakspeare, no attempt has hitherto been made to render him the

medium for a comprehensive and connected view of the times in which he lived.

"Yet, if any man be allowed to fill a station thus conspicuous and important, Shakspeare has undoubtedly the best claim to the distinction; not only from his pre-eminence as a dramatic poet, but from the intimate relation which his works bear to the manners, customs, superstitions, and amusements of his age.

"Struck with the interest which a work of this kind, if properly executed, might possess, the author was induced, several years ago, to commence the undertaking, with the express intention of blending with the detail of manners, &c. such a portion of criticism, biography, and literary history, as should render the whole still more attractive and complete.

"In attempting this, it has been his aim to place Shakspeare in the foreground of the picture, and to throw around him, in groups more or less distinct and full, the various objects of his design; giving them prominency and light, according to their greater or smaller connection with the principal figure.

"More especially has it been his wish to infuse throughout the whole plan, whether considered in respect to its entire scope, or to the parts of which it is composed, that degree of unity and integrity, of relative proportion and just bearing, without which neither harmony, simplicity, nor effect, can be expected or produced.

"With a view also to distinctness and perspicuity of elucidation, the whole has been distributed into three parts or pictures, entitled,—SHAKSPEARE IN STRATFORD;—SHAKSPEARE IN LONDON;—SHAKSPEARE IN RETIREMENT;—which, though inseparably united, as forming but portions of the same story, and harmonized by the same means, have yet, both in subject and execution, a peculiar character to support.

"The *first* represents our poet in the days of his youth, on the banks of his native Avon, in the midst of rural imagery, occupations, and amusements; in the *second*, we behold him in the capital of his country, in the centre of rivalry and competition, in the active pursuit of reputation and glory; and in the *third*, we accompany the venerated bard to the shades of retirement, to the bosom of domestic peace, to the enjoyment of unsullied fame."

Feeling myself precluded from giving any opinion on this production, which could scarcely indeed be divested of partiality, I must beg leave to refer those of my readers, who may wish to ascertain in what manner it has been executed, to the various Reviews mentioned in the note below.*

The year 1817 seems to have been fertile in

* Vide Literary Gazette, Nov. 22nd, and Dec. 13th, 1817.—Monthly Magazine, Jan. 1818.—Edinburgh Magazine, Jan. 1818.—British Critic, April, 1818.—Gentleman's Magazine, Sept. and Octob. 1818.—Edinburgh Monthly Review, April, 1819.—Monthly Review, August, 1819, &c. &c.

Shakspearian literature; for within a few months after the appearance of the volumes just mentioned, came forth Mr. Hazlit's "Characters of Shakspeare's Plays," one motive for the production of which, he tells us, was "some little jealousy of the character of the national understanding; for we were piqued that it should be reserved for a foreign critic (Schlegel) to give reasons for the faith which we English have in Shakspeare. Certainly no writer among ourselves has shown either the same enthusiastic admiration of his genius, or the same philosophical acuteness in pointing out his characteristic excellencies."[v]

This is just and liberal praise, nor can the spirit of emulation from which he admits his undertaking to have partly originated, be in any degree blamed. The confession, in fact, is only hazardous to himself, for it immediately throws his labours into a field of dangerous comparison. From the free and unreserved manner, indeed, in which Mr. Hazlitt has spoken of his contemporaries, he has been almost necessarily subjected to much harsh censure; but of the work before us, it may, I think, be justly said that it is written with great taste and feeling, and exhibits, for the most part, a judicious, spirited, and correct analysis of the characters of our great bard. Nor will the enthusiastic admiration with which it abounds, though strongly, and sometimes rather quaintly, expressed, be estimated by any poetical mind as out of place; for, as the

[v] Preface, p. ix.

author has well observed, "it may be said of Shakspeare, that 'those who are not for him are against him:' for indifference is here the height of injustice. We may sometimes, in order 'to do a great right, do a little wrong.' An overstrained enthusiasm is more pardonable with respect to Shakspeare than the want of it, for our admiration cannot easily surpass his genius."*

Much controversy having arisen amongst the critics and commentators on Shakspeare as to the genuineness of the pictures and prints reputed to be portraits of the bard; and numerous impositions on this head having been practised on the credulity of the public, it became an object of no little interest to ascertain what were the pretensions of those apparently best entitled to notice, by the character of their advocates, and the evidence collected in their favour; a *desideratum* which has been satisfactorily supplied by Mr. James Boaden, who, in the year 1824, published "An Inquiry into the Authenticity of various Pictures and Prints, which, from the decease of the Poet to our own times, have been offered to the public as Portraits of Shakspeare."

In this volume, which, instead of turning out, as might have been anticipated from its title, a somewhat dry antiquarian discussion, is one of the most entertaining productions to which the fame of Shakspeare has given birth, the ingenious author has brought forward very convincing proofs in

* Preface, p. xv.

favour of the authenticity of *four* representations of the poet, namely, the Print from Martin Droeshout,[x] the Bust at Stratford-upon-Avon,[y] the

[x] Mr. Boaden concludes his observations on the head by Droeshout, by observing that "it has a verification certainly more *direct* than any other. Ben Jonson is express upon its likeness; Shakspeare's friends and partners at the Globe give this resemblance in preference to some OTHERS, equally attainable. There can be no ground of preference, but greater likeness. If they knew, absolutely, of no other portrait, which I cannot think, the verisimilitude of this is equally undisturbed." —Inquiry, p. 24.

[y] The sculptor of this bust, who had hitherto remained unknown, and only an object of conjecture, is at length ascertained by the recent publication of the "Life, Diary, and Correspondence of Sir William Dugdale." Edited by W. Hamper, Esq., London 1827. In this interesting volume occurs the following entry:—

"Shakspeares and John Combes Monumts. at Stratford, sup' Avon, made by one Gerard Johnson."

A note informs us that this is taken from a folio MS. left by Dugdale, now in the possession of his representative, and entitled "'Certificates returned in Aprill and May 1593, of all the Strangers, Forreiners abiding in London,' where they were borne, and last lived before theyre coming over, what children every of them had, as also what servants and apprentices, Strangers and English, of what Church every of them was, and English people every of them did sett on work."

The Certificate relative to our sculptor, is as follows:

"(St. Thomas Apostell's.)

"*Garratt Johnson*, and Mary his wyffe, housholders; a Hollander, borne at Amsterdam; a Tombe maker; 5 sonnes, aged 22, 11, 10, 6, 4, and 1 daughter aged 14, all borne in England; 26 years resident; a denizen; Englishe Churche; 4 Jurnimen; 2 Prentizes, and 1 Englishman at work; no servant."

Chandos Head, and the Portrait by Cornelius Jansen. The small Head engraved by Marshall for the edition of Shakspeare's Poems of 1640, might, I think, have been spared, as it is evidently a mere reduction from the larger print of Droeshout, and so reduced as to impart to the countenance what the original engraving in no degree warrants, —an air of vulgarity and cunning, features as discordant as possible with our conception of the character of Shakspeare.

Of the four prior heads, it may, in my judgment, be correctly affirmed that, whilst the features in their outline very strongly resemble each other, the predominating expression in each is of a different, though nearly allied cast; the terms *tenderness*, *cheerfulness*, *intellectuality*, and *sweetness*, being very decidedly applicable to them in the order in which they have been enumerated above; developements of mind and disposition, such as we know from his life and writings formed the character of the man, and which we cannot therefore but conclude, either conjointly or successively, stamped their image on his countenance.

The portrait of Cornelius Jansen is the favourite, and perhaps justly so, of Mr. Boaden, as it seems, of the four resemblances, to make the nearest approach to the combination of qualities I have just mentioned. "The expression of the countenance," he remarks, "really equals the demand of the fancy; and you feel that every thing was possible to a being so happily constituted."[1]

[1] In short, in the portrait of Droeshout we may be said to

Annexed to the disquisition on the Graphic Portraits of Shakspeare, which forms the principal object of his volume, Mr. Boaden has added some very ingenious observations and conjectures on a Poetical Portrait of the Bard, which first appeared in the folio of 1632, entitled "On Worthy Master Shakespeare, and his Poems," and subscribed "The friendly Admirer of his Endowments, I. M. S."

To this poem, as of very superior merit, the Editor has repeatedly referred in his "Shakspeare and his Times;" and in a note to his "Tale of the Days of Shakspeare," in his "Noontide Leisure," 1824, he remarks: "though a just appreciation of the genius of Shakspeare was by no means so general and extended in the reign of James as in these our own days, yet were there several exalted spirits among the contemporaries of the poet, who fully and critically knew the incomparable value of their countryman, and expressed their estimate too of his poetical character in terms which have not since been surpassed, if equalled; and I would particularly mention as instances of this, the poem of Ben Jonson, and the verses to which the initials I. M. S. are annexed, commencing 'A mind reflecting ages past.' This latter production, which was first prefixed to the folio of 1632, I have already

behold *A Man who had suffered himself, and felt for others*; in that of the bust, *A Man of great humour and constitutional pleasantry*; in the Chandos Head, *A Man of vivid imagination and high mental powers*; and in that of Jansen, *A Man who was deeply and alike entitled to our love and admiration.*

noticed in my 'Shakspeare and his Times,' Vol. 2, p. 545 et seq.; and I must say that I think it beyond all competition, the most powerful, comprehensive, and splendid poetical encomium on our immortal bard which has yet been produced."[a]

With this eulogy Mr. Boaden not only fully accords, but enters at considerable length, and with great taste and powers of discrimination, into the origin and merits of the poem which gave birth to it. After setting aside the supposition of its having been written by Jasper Mayne, Student, or John Marston, Satirist, or John Milton, Senior, he offers very cogent reasons for ascribing it to George Chapman, the once celebrated translator of Homer; and he enables his reader at the same time, by transcribing the poem, and comparing it with numerous passages from Chapman, to form a judgment for himself. That this, from the striking nature of the evidence brought forward, will be in favour of Mr. Boaden's conjecture as to its parentage, there can be little doubt; nor, as to its merit, when considered as a *metrical* picture, will he feel less inclined perhaps to agree with him, when he describes it to be the truest portrait that exists of the powers of Shakspeare as a poet.

In the same year with Mr. Boaden's publication, appeared "The Life of Shakspeare; Enquiries into the Originality of his Dramatic Plots and

[a] Vide vol. 1. p. 34.

Characters; and Essays on the Ancient Theatres and Theatrical Usages." By Augustine Skottowe. Two volumes 8vo.

The Biography of Shakspeare in this work, which, with an Appendix of Notes, occupies rather better than a third part of the first volume, is written with elegance and accuracy, and with a strict attention to what little novelty the latest researches of Mr. Malone had brought forth. The History of the Stage by this industrious editor is skilfully epitomised, and not without some additional facts, and several inferences which, though at variance with those of his predecessor, Mr. Skottowe has ably supported. He has, indeed, in several other places, dissented from the opinions and conjectures of Mr. Malone, and in none with more success than where he maintains, against the scepticism of that critic, the traditional story of Shakspeare's predatory incursions on the manor of Sir Thomas Lucy.[b]

The greater part, however, of the labours of Mr. Skottowe are devoted to a developement of the origin of Shakspeare's dramas, and to a display of the admirable use which the poet had made of

[b] That the narrative of this youthful frolic has, from its universality and iteration, some foundation in truth, notwithstanding all that Mr. Malone has mustered against it, had been, indeed, previously asserted by myself in a note to the "Tale of the Days of Shakspeare," in which I have endeavoured to prove Mr. Malone's reasoning and inferences on this subject to be illogical and inconclusive.—See Noontide Leisure, vol. 1. p. 83.

his materials; ground, indeed, which had been partially pre-occupied by Mrs. Lennox, who, in the years 1753 and 4, published, in three vols. 12mo., a work entitled "Shakspeare Illustrated; or the Novels and Histories on which the Plays of Shakspeare are founded, collected and translated from the original Authors, with Critical Remarks." Her task, however, was but very imperfectly performed, for, of more than one half of the plays of her author the sources remained unexplored; and her notes were rather censures on the liberties which the bard had taken with the incidents to which she had traced him, than elucidatory of the exquisite manner in which he had occasionally moulded them to his purpose, and yet more frequently embalmed them for immortality, by blending with their outline the richest creations of his own fancy. The subject was therefore still open to Mr. Skottowe, and it is but justice to say that he has gone through the entire series not only with the patient research of the literary historian, but with the taste and discriminating tact of the elegant and enlightened critic.[c]

[c] I ought here, perhaps, to have inserted some notice of a work on the Portraits of Shakspeare, which has appeared within these few months, entitled, "Historical Account of all the Portraits of Shakspeare that have been generally considered the most genuine, together with every particular which can be collected respecting them; also Critical Remarks on the Opinions of Boaden, Malone, Steevens, &c. &c.; to which are added, some curious and interesting particulars of the various fabricated and spurious Pictures of the Poet, which have been

To the retrospect which has thus been taken of the Variorum Editions of Shakspeare, and of the Detached Publications exclusively appropriated to his genius and writings, it now only remains to add a brief statement of the plan which has been chosen, and of the materials which have been collected, for forming the present volume, which, as I have mentioned in the opening of this Essay, is intended to exemplify the *third* mode that has been adopted for the illustration of Shakspeare, namely, by *Criticisms on his Genius and Writings dispersed through various Miscellaneous Departments of Literature*.

So much as Shakspeare has lately attracted the attention of all ranks of the literary world, it is somewhat remarkable that the task which in these pages I have endeavoured to perform, should not

foisted upon the public of late years, &c. By Abraham Wivell, Portrait-painter, 8vo. With six Portraits, and a Frontispiece of the Monument at Stratford-upon-Avon, 1827."

One object of this publication, which exhibits considerable research, is to prove the authenticity of the Felton Portrait of the bard, which appears to be the favourite picture of Mr. Wivell. He has, it must be allowed, added some strength to the testimony in behalf of the genuineness of this portrait, by ascertaining that the initials on the back of the panel on which it is painted, hitherto supposed to be R. N., are in fact, R. B.; a discovery which gives weight to the previous conjecture, that this picture might have come from the easel of *Richard Burbage*, who was an artist as well as a player, and to whom tradition has ascribed, as the friend of Shakspeare, such an employment of his pencil.

have been executed before; for although, as we have already seen, a considerable portion of valuable criticism is connected with the Variorum Editions of the poet, and many separate works, and some of great merit, have been entirely devoted to Shakspeare, yet have there, moreover, appeared at various times, and especially within the last seventy years, numerous disquisitions on Shakspeare and his dramas, scattered through a wide field of miscellaneous and periodical publications, of which several may be put into competition with the most esteemed in the two classes to which I have just alluded.

To select these, which, with but one exception, I have found it necessary to draw from writers only of the present, and the latter half of the past century; to give them a lucid arrangement, and to accompany them, as far as might be deemed requisite, with notes, constitute the chief business of the volume now before my readers. It is, indeed, worthy of remark that, from the time of Ben Jonson to the period of Dryden, whose noble and comprehensive, though brief encomium on Shakspeare in 1668[4] forms the exception just mentioned, there is no incidental criticism on our great bard worth recording, although three editions of his plays had been then before the public; and from the age of Dryden to the middle of the

[4] Inserted in his "Essay on Dramatick Poesy," which was, in fact, written in 1665, though not published until 1668.—Vide Malone's Dryden, vol. 1. part 2d.

eighteenth century, a somewhat similar deficiency, notwithstanding the editions of Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, and Warburton had come forth, may be traced.

It is, indeed, from the prevalence or paucity of these casual notices, rather than from the tone of the professed editor and critic, that we may most certainly ascertain the popularity or obscurity of an author, especially of a poet. Shakspeare had been the great favourite of the reigns of Elizabeth and James, and the prior part of that of Charles the First; but the domination of puritanism, and the still more debasing effects of the dissolute manners of the age of Charles the Second, proved highly injurious to all pure taste and just manly feeling; and, as one of the results of this degraded state of the national literature, Shakspeare fell into comparative neglect, and, notwithstanding the incidental criticisms of Dryden dispersed through his prefaces and dedications, to such a degree, that we find Steele, in no. 231 of his Tatler, dated September the 30th, 1710, actually giving the entire story of Catharine and Petruchio as a fact which had lately occurred in a gentleman's family in Lincolnshire. From which we cannot but infer that he either knew not that it formed the fable of a play in Shakspeare, but copied it from some scarce and forgotten pamphlet; or, knowing it to be the property of our bard, was convinced such was the obscurity into which the play had fallen, that he might safely present it to the public as a recent

and original event.[e] The latter was most probably the case, although the edition by Rowe had been published but the year before; and, indeed, if we set aside two or three notices in the Spectator by Hughes and Addison during the years 1711 and 1712,[f] we shall not find it an easy matter to discover, in the *popular* and *periodical* literature of our country, any observations on the bard of Avon worth preserving, until the appearance of the Rambler and Adventurer of Johnson and Hawksworth in the years 1750 and 1753.

From this period, however, not only has Shakspeare been the object of unceasing editorship and formal voluminous criticism, but the periodical and miscellaneous productions of the press, rapidly and even prodigiously as they have encreased of late, have been fertile in casual essays and remarks on his genius and writings; whilst upon the continent too, numerous translations of, and occasional remarks on the poet, have made their appearance.

It is, I trust, scarcely necessary to add that, in culling from so wide a field, I have been almost fastidiously careful in my choice of specimens. Indeed, as a warrant for this, it may be sufficient merely to mention the names of Dryden, Warton, Mackenzie, Cumberland, Beattie, Godwin, Lamb, Coleridge, Campbell, and Sir Walter Scott, as

[e] Vide Drake's Essays, Biographical, Critical, and Historical, illustrative of the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian, vol. 1. p. 216.

[f] Vide Spectator, nos. 141 and 419.

those who, from our native stores, with the exception of a few anonymous contributions of great excellence, have furnished me with materials.

And, if we turn to the continent, scarcely a less rich prospect, during a nearly equal period of time, would seem to meet our view. In Germany, for instance, as translators of or occasional critics on Shakspeare, we can enumerate Wieland, Eschenburg,[s] Lessing, Voss, Herder, Goethe, Tieck, and the two Schlegels; in Italy, Michele Leoni; in Spain, Fernandez Moratin; and in France, Le Mercier, Le Tourneur, Ducis, Madame De Stael Holstein, and Villemain.

I have only farther to remark that, from the abundance of materials, and from the wish of not spreading them beyond the compass of a single volume, I have found it necessary to restrict my selections from foreign sources to a few general

[s] Eschenburgh continued and completed the translation of Shakspeare commenced by Wieland. It was published between the years 1775 and 1782, and consists of thirteen volumes 8vo. Eschenburg was a man of great learning and considerable taste and genius, and a supplementary volume to his version, which he printed in 1787, contains, for a foreigner, a very extraordinary degree of information concerning Shakspeare and his writings, his editors, commentators, critics, and translators. It is arranged under ten heads; namely, 1. Of Shakspeare's life; 2. His learning; 3. His genius; 4. His defects; 5. State of the English Stage during his time; 6. Order of his plays; 7. English editions of his plays; 8. Criticisms on the author and his editors; 9. Catalogue of the foreign translations and imitations of Shakspeare; and 10. Of his other poems, with specimens.

portraitures of Shakspeare from the two Schlegels, and to a few extracts from Lessing, Goethe, Madame De Stael Holstein, and, lastly, Villemain, of whose Essay on the Bard, as given in the second edition of his *Nouveaux Mélanges Historiques et Littéraires*, published but a few months ago, I have ventured to insert an entire translation, containing, as it does, the latest and most interesting *exposée* of the estimation in which Shakspeare is at present held in the land of Corneille and Voltaire.

MEMORIALS OF SHAKSPEARE.

PART II.

No. I.

ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAKSPEARE.

To JUDGE with fairness of an author's works, we must observe, firstly, what is essential; and secondly, what arises from circumstances. It is essential, as in Milton, that poetry be *simple, sensuous,* and *impassionate*:—*simple,* that it may appeal to the elements and the primary laws of our nature; *sensuous,* since it is only by sensuous images that we can elicit truth as at a flash; *impassionate,* since images must be vivid, in order to move our passions, and awaken our affections.

In judging of different poets, we ought to enquire what authors have brought into fullest play our imagination, or have created the greatest excitements, and produced the completest harmony.—Considering only great exquisiteness of language, and sweetness of metre, it is impossible to deny to Pope the title of a delightful writer: whether he be a poet must be determined as we define the word; doubtless, if every thing that pleases be poetry, Pope's satires and epistles must be poetry. Poetry, however, as distinguished from general modes of composition, does not rest in metre; it is not poetry if it make no appeal to our imagination, our passions, and our sympathy.—One character

attaches to all true poets,—they write from a principle within, independent of every thing without. The work of a true poet, in its form, its shapings and modifications, is distinguished from all other works that assume to belong to the class of poetry, as a natural from an artificial flower; or as the mimic garden of a child from an enamelled meadow. In the former the flowers are broken from their stems, and stuck in the ground; they are beautiful to the eye, and fragrant to the sense; but their colours soon fade, and their odour is transient as the smile of the planter: while the meadow may be visited again and again with renewed delight; its beauty is innate in the soil, and its bloom is of the freshness of nature.[h]

The next ground of judging is, how far a poet is influenced by accidental circumstances—he writes not for past ages, but for that in which he lives, and that which is to follow. It is natural that he should conform to the circumstances of his day; but a true genius will stand independent of these circumstances; and it is observable of Shakspeare, that he leaves little to regret that he was born in such an age. The great era in modern times was what is called the restoration of literature; the ages which preceded it were called the dark ages; it would be more wise, perhaps, to say the ages in

[h] The distinction between the mere fabricator of harmonious metre and the genuine poet, was never more impressively drawn than through the medium of this lovely and truly original simile.

which we were in the dark. It is usually overlooked that the supposed dark era was not universal, but partial and successive, or alternate; that the dark age of England was not the dark age of Italy; but that one country was in its light and vigour, while another was in its gloom and bondage. The Reformation sounded through Europe like a trumpet; from the king to the peasant there was an enthusiasm for knowledge; the discovery of a manuscript was the subject of an embassy. Erasmus read by moonlight because he could not afford a torch, and begged a penny, not for the love of charity, but for the love of learning. The three great points of attention were morals, religion, and taste; but it becomes necessary to distinguish in this age mere men of learning from men of genius; all, however, were close copyists of the ancients, and this was the only way by which the taste of mankind could be improved, and the understanding informed. Whilst Dante imagined himself a copyist of Virgil, and Ariosto of Homer, they were both unconscious of that greater power working within them, which carried them beyond their originals; for their originals were polytheists. All great discoveries bear the stamp of the age in which they were made: hence we perceive the effect of their purer religion, which was visible in their lives; and in reading their works, we should not content ourselves with the narration of events long since passed, but apply their maxims and conduct to our own.

Having intimated that times and manners lend their form and pressure to the genius, it may be useful to draw a slight parallel between the *ancient* and *modern stage*, as it existed in Greece and in England.—The Greeks were polytheists; their religion was local; the object of all their knowledge, science, and taste, was their Gods: their productions were, therefore, (if the expression may be allowed) *statuesque;* the moderns we may designate as *picturesque;* the end complete harmony. The Greeks reared a structure, which, in its parts and as a whole, filled the mind with the calm and elevated impression of perfect beauty and symmetrical proportion. The moderns, blending materials, produced one striking whole; this may be illustrated by comparing the Pantheon with York Minster or Westminster Abbey. Upon the same scale we may compare Sophocles with Shakspeare: in the one there is a completeness, a satisfying, an excellence on which the mind can rest; in the other we see a blended multitude of materials; great and little; magnificent and mean; mingled, if we may so say, with a dissatisfying, or falling short of perfection; yet so promising of our progression, that we would not exchange it for that repose of mind which dwells on the forms of symmetry in acquiescent admiration of grace. This general characteristic of the ancient and modern poetry might be exemplified in a parallel of their ancient and modern music: the ancient music consisted of melody by the succession of pleasing sounds; the modern

embraces harmony, the result of combination, and effect of the whole.

Great as was the genius of Shakspeare, his judgment was at least equal. Of this we shall be convinced, if we look round on the age, and compare the nature of the respective dramas of Greece and England, differing from the necessary dissimilitude of circumstances by which they are modified and influenced. The Greek stage had its origin in the ceremonies of a sacrifice, such as the goat to Bacchus;—it were erroneous to call him only the jolly god of wine: among the ancients he was venerable; he was the symbol of that power which acts without our consciousness from the vital energies of nature, as Apollo was the symbol of our intellectual consciousness. Their heroes under his influence performed more than human actions; hence tales of their favourite champions soon passed into dialogue. On the Greek stage the chorus was always before the audience—no curtain dropped—*change of place* was impossible; the absurd idea of its improbability was not indulged. The scene cannot be an exact copy of nature, but only an imitation. If we can believe ourselves at Thebes in one act, we can believe ourselves at Athens in the next. There seems to be no just boundary but what the feelings prescribe. In Greece, however, great judgment was necessary where the same persons were perpetually before the audience. If a story lasted twenty-four hours or twenty-four years, it was equally improbable—they never attempted to

impose on the senses by bringing places to men, though they could bring men to places.

Unity of time was not necessary, where no offence was taken at its lapse between the acts, or between scene and scene; for where there were no acts or scenes, it was impossible rigidly to observe its laws. To overcome these difficulties, the judgment and great genius of the ancients supplied music, and with the charms of their poetry filled up the vacuity. In the story of the Agamemnon of Æschylus, the taking of Troy was supposed to be announced by the lighting of beacons on the Asiatic shore: the mind being beguiled by the narrative ode of the chorus embracing the events of the siege, hours passed as minutes, and no improbability was felt at the return of Agamemnon; and yet, examined rigidly, he must have passed over from Troy in less than fifteen minutes. Another fact here presented itself, seldom noticed: with the ancients three plays were performed in one day; they were called Trilogies. In Shakspeare we may fancy these Trilogies connected into one representation. If *Lear* were divided into three, each part would be a play with the ancients; or take the three plays of Agamemnon, and divide them into acts, they would form one play:

1st Act would be the Usurpation of Ægisthus, and Murder of Agamemnon;

2d. Revenge of Orestes, and Murder of his Mother;

3d. The Penance of Orestes;

consuming a time of twenty-two years: the three plays being but three acts, the dropping of the curtain was as the conclusion of a play.

Contrast the stage of the ancients with that of the time of Shakspeare, and we shall be struck with his genius: with them it had the trappings of royal and religious ceremony; with him it was a naked room, a blanket for a curtain; but with his vivid appeals, the imagination figured it out

A field for monarchs.

After the rupture of the Northern nations, the Latin language, blended with the modern, produced the *Romant* tongue, the language of the minstrels; to which term, as distinguishing their songs and fabliaux, we owe the word and the species of *romance:* the romantic may be considered as opposed to the antique, and from this change of manners, those of Shakspeare take their colouring. He is not to be tried by ancient and classic rules, but by the standard of his age. That law of unity which has its foundation, not in factitious necessity of custom, but in nature herself, is instinctively observed by Shakspeare.

A *unity of feeling* pervades the whole of his plays. In *Romeo and Juliet* all is youth and spring: it is youth with its follies, its virtues, its precipitancies; it is spring with its odours, flowers, and transiency: the same feeling commences, goes through, and ends the play. The old men, the Capulets and Montagues, are not common old men; they have an eagerness, an hastiness, a

precipitancy—the effect of spring. With Romeo, his precipitate change of passion, his hasty marriage, and his rash death, are all the—effects of youth. With Juliet, love has all that is tender and melancholy in the nightingale, all that is voluptuous in the rose, with whatever is sweet in the freshness of spring; but it ends with a long deep sigh, like the breeze of the evening. This unity of character pervades the whole of his dramas.[1]

[1] This description of *Romeo and Juliet* is evidently founded on what Schlegel has so beautifully said on the same subject in his Dramatic Lectures, which were delivered to an admiring audience as early as 1808. It is, perhaps, the very finest passage in his *characters* of the plays of Shakspeare; criticisms which, though uniformly written with great eloquence, have not been unjustly charged with a tincture of mysticism, and with a spirit of indiscriminate eulogy.

"It was reserved for Shakspeare," remarks this powerful writer, "to unite, in his *Romeo and Juliet*, purity of heart and the glow of imagination, sweetness and dignity of manners, and passionate violence, in one ideal picture. By the manner in which he has handled it, it has become a glorious song of praise on that inexpressible feeling which ennobles the soul, and gives to it its highest sublimity, and which elevates even the senses themselves into soul, and at the same time is a melancholy elegy on its frailty from its own nature and external circumstances; at once the deification and the burial of love. It appears here like a heavenly spark that, descending to the earth, is converted into a flash of lightning, by which mortal creatures are almost in the same moment set on fire and consumed. Whatever is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous on the first opening of the rose, is breathed into this poem. But even more rapidly than the earliest blossoms of

Of that species of writing termed tragi-comedy, too much has been produced, but it has been doomed to the shelf. With Shakspeare, his comic constantly re-acted on his tragic characters. *Lear*, wandering amidst the tempest, had all his feeling of distress increased by the overflowings of the wild wit of the Fool; as vinegar poured upon wounds exacerbates their pain, thus even his comic humour tends to the developement of tragic passion.

The next character belonging to Shakspeare as Shakspeare, was the *keeping at all times the high road of life:* with him there were no innocent adulteries; he never rendered that amiable which religion and reason taught us to detest; he never clothed vice in the garb of virtue, like *Beaumont* and *Fletcher*, the *Kotzebues* of his day; his fathers

youth and beauty decay, it hurries on from the first timidly-bold declaration of love and modest return to the most unlimited passion, to an irrevocable union; then, amidst alternating storms of rapture and despair, to the death of the two lovers, who still appear enviable as their love survives them, and as by their death they have obtained a triumph over every separating power. The sweetest and the bitterest, love and hatred, festivity and dark forebodings, tender embraces and sepulchres, the fulness of life and self-annihilation, are all here brought close to each other; and all these contrasts are so blended in the harmonious and wonderful work into a unity of impression, that the echo which the whole leaves behind in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh."—Vol. 2, p. 187, Black's Translation.

were roused by ingratitude, his husbands were stung by unfaithfulness; the affections were wounded in those points where all may and all must feel.[1] Another evidence of exquisite judgment in Shakspeare was, that he seized hold of popular tales. *Lear* and the *Merchant of Venice* were popular tales, but so excellently managed, both were the representation of men in all ages and at all times.

His dramas do not arise absolutely out of some one extraordinary circumstance; the scenes may stand, independently of any such one connecting incident, as faithful reflections of men and manners. In his *mode of drawing characters*, there were no pompous descriptions of a man by himself; his character was to be drawn as in real life, from the whole course of the play, or out of the mouths of his enemies or friends: this might be exemplified in the character of *Polonius*, which actors have often misrepresented. Shakspeare never intended to represent him as a buffoon: it was natural that Hamlet, a young man of genius and fire, detesting formality, and disliking Polonius

[1] What is here, and subsequently, said by Mr. Coleridge on the morality and comparative purity of Shakspeare, ought never to be forgotten. It is one of those admirable features in this great poet which has rendered his plays not merely, like those of his contemporaries and successors, a source of gratification for the feelings and imagination, but has stamped them as the vehicle of the noblest lessons of practical wisdom and virtue.

for political reasons, as imagining that he had assisted his uncle in his usurpation, should express himself satirically; but Hamlet's words should not be taken as Shakspeare's conception of him. In Polonius a certain induration of character arose from long habits of business; but take his advice to Laertes, the reverence of his memory by Ophelia, and we shall find that he was a statesman of business, though somewhat passed his faculties: one particular feature which belonged to his character was, that his recollections of past life were of wisdom, and showed a knowledge of human nature; whilst what immediately passed before and escaped from him, was emblematical of weakness.

Another excellence in Shakspeare, and in which no other writer equalled him, was in the *language of nature;* so correct was it that we could see ourselves in all he wrote; his style and manner had also that felicity, that not a sentence could be read without its being discovered if it were *Shakspearian.* In observations of living character, such as of landlords and postillions, *Fielding* had great excellence; but in drawing from his own heart, and depicting that species of character which no observation could teach, he failed in comparison with *Richardson,* who perpetually placed himself, as it were, in a day-dream: but Shakspeare excelled in both; witness an accuracy of character in the *Nurse* of Juliet. On the other hand, in relation to the

great characters of *Othello*, *Iago*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard the Third*, as he never could have witnessed any thing similar, he appears invariably to have asked himself, How should I act or speak in such circumstances?—His comic characters were also peculiar: a drunken constable was not uncommon; but he could make folly a vehicle for wit, as in *Dogberry*; every thing was as a sub-stratum on which his creative genius might erect a superstructure.

To distinguish what is *legitimate* in Shakspeare from what does not belong to him, we must observe his varied images symbolical of moral truth, thrusting by and seeming to trip up each other, from an impetuosity of thought, producing a metre which is always flowing from one verse into the other, and seldom closing with the tenth syllable of the line; an instance of which may be found in the play of *Pericles*, written a century before, but which Shakspeare altered, and where his alteration may be recognised even to half a line: this was the case not merely in his later plays, but in his early dramas, such as *Love's Labour Lost*, the same perfection in the flowing continuity of interchangeable pauses is constantly perceptible.

Lastly, contrast his *morality* with the writers of his own or the succeeding age, or with those of the present day, who boast of their superiority: he never, as before observed, deserted the high road of life; he never made his lovers openly gross or profane; for common candour must

allow that his images were incomparably less so than those of his contemporaries; even the letters of females in high life were coarser than his writings.

The writings of Beaumont and Fletcher bear no comparison; the grossest passages of Shakspeare were purity to theirs; and it should be remembered that, though he might occasionally disgust a sense of delicacy, he never injured the mind; he caused no excitement of passion which he flattered to degrade; never used what was faulty for a faulty purpose; carried on no warfare against virtue, by which wickedness may be made to appear as not wickedness, and where our sympathy was to be entrapped by the misfortunes of vice: with him vice never walked, as it were, in twilight. He never inverted the order of nature and propriety, like some modern writers, who suppose every magistrate to be a glutton or a drunkard, and every poor man humane and temperate; with him we had no benevolent braziers or sentimental rat-catchers. Nothing was purposely out of place.

If a man speak injuriously of a friend, our vindication of him is naturally warm: Shakspeare had been accused of profaneness; he (Mr. C.), from the perusal of him, had acquired a habit of looking into his own heart, and perceived the goings on of his nature; and confident he was, Shakspeare was a writer of all others the most

calculated to make his readers better as well as wiser.

COLERIDGE.[k]

[k] This outline of an Introductory Lecture by Mr. Coleridge, delivered in 1813, on the Characteristics of Shakspeare, has been taken from a report published in a newspaper of the day.—It has condensed into a small compass, and with much felicity of imagery and diction, all the leading features of the great dramatist; forming a picture which, as coming from one of the most original and imaginative poets of the present times, has on that account, likewise, a peculiar claim to our notice.

No. II.

ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE GENIUS OF SHAKSPEARE, AND ON HIS IRREGULARITIES IN RELATION TO DRAMATIC UNITY.

SHAKSPEARE created our *romantic* drama, or, if the assertion is to be qualified, it requires but a small qualification. There were undoubtedly prior occupants of the dramatic ground in our language; but they appear only like unprosperous settlers on the patches and skirts of a wilderness which he converted into a garden. He is therefore never compared with his native predecessors. Criticism goes back for names worthy of being put in competition with his, to the first great masters of dramatic invention; and even in the points of dissimilarity between them and him, discovers some of the highest indications of his genius. Compared with the classical composers of antiquity, he is to our conceptions nearer the character of an universal poet; more acquainted with man in the real world, and more terrific and bewitching in the preternatural. He expanded the magic circle of the drama beyond the limits that belonged to it in antiquity; made it embrace more time and locality; filled it with larger business and action, with vicissitudes of gay and serious emotion, which classical taste had kept divided; with characters which

developed humanity in stronger lights and subtler movements; and with a language more wildly, more playfully diversified by fancy and passion, than was ever spoken on any stage. Like nature herself, he presents alternations of the gay and the tragic; and his mutability, like the suspense and precariousness of real existence, often deepens the force of our impressions. He converted imitation into illusion. To say that, magician as he was, he was not faultless, is only to recal the flat and stale truism, that every thing human is imperfect. But how to estimate his imperfections! To praise him is easy—*In facili causa cuivis licet esse diserto*;—but to make a special, full, and accurate estimate of his imperfections, would require a delicate and comprehensive discrimination, and an authority, which are almost as seldom united in one man as the powers of Shakspeare himself. He is the poet of the world. The magnitude of his genius puts it beyond all private opinion to set defined limits to the admiration which is due to it. We know, upon the whole, that the sum of blemishes to be deducted from his merits is not great, and we should scarcely be thankful to one who should be anxious to make it. No other poet triumphs so anomalously over eccentricities and peculiarities in composition, which would appear blemishes in others; so that his blemishes and beauties have an affinity which we are jealous of trusting any hand with the task of separating. We dread the interference of criticism with a fascination so often inexplicable

by critical laws, and justly apprehend that any man in standing between us and Shakspeare may show, for pretended spots upon his disk, only the shadows of his own opacity.

Still it is not a part even of that enthusiastic creed, to believe that he has no excessive mixture of the tragic and comic, no blemishes of language in the elliptical throng and impatient pressure of his images, no irregularities of plot and action, which another Shakspeare would avoid, if "nature had not broken the mould in which she made him," or if he should come back into the world to blend experience with inspiration.

The bare name of the dramatic unities is apt to excite revolting ideas of pedantry, arts of poetry, and French criticism. With none of these do I wish to annoy the reader. I conceive that it may be said of those unities as of fire and water, that they are good servants, but bad masters. In perfect rigour they were never imposed by the Greeks, and they would be still heavier shackles if they were closely rivetted on our own drama. It would be worse than useless to confine dramatic action literally and immoveably to one spot, or its imaginary time to the time in which it is represented. On the other hand, dramatic time and place cannot surely admit of indefinite expansion. It would be better, for the sake of illusion and probability, to change the scene from Windsor to London, than from London to Pekin; it would look more like reality, if a messenger, who went and returned in

the course of the play, told us of having performed a journey of ten or twenty rather than of a thousand miles, and if the spectator had neither that nor any other circumstance to make him ask how so much could be performed in so short a time.

In an abstract view of dramatic art, its principles must appear to lie nearer to unity than to the opposite extreme of disunion, in our conceptions of time and place. Giving up the law of unity in its literal rigour, there is still a latitude of its application which may preserve proportion and harmony in the drama.

The brilliant and able Schlegel has traced the principles of what he denominates the romantic in opposition to the classical drama, and conceives that Shakspeare's theatre, when tried by those principles, will be found not to have violated any of the unities, if they are largely and liberally understood. I have no doubt that Mr. Schlegel's criticism will be found to have proved this point in a considerable number of the works of our mighty poet. There are traits, however, in Shakspeare, which, I must own, appear to my humble judgment incapable of being illustrated by any system or principles of art I do not allude to his historical plays, which, expressly from being historical, may be called a privileged class; but in those of purer fiction, it strikes me that there are licences conceded indeed to imagination's "chartered libertine," but anomalous with regard to anything which can be recognized as principles in dramatic

art. When Perdita, for instance, grows from the cradle to the marriage altar in the course of the play, I can perceive no unity in the design of the piece, and take refuge in the supposition of Shakspeare's genius triumphing and trampling over art. Yet Mr. Schlegel, as far as I have observed, makes no exception to this breach of temporal unity; nor, in proving Shakspeare a regular artist on a mighty scale, does he deign to notice this circumstance even as the *ultima Thule* of his licence. If a man contends that dramatic laws are all idle restrictions, I can understand him; or if he says that Perdita's growth on the stage is a trespass on art, but that Shakspeare's fascination over and over again redeems it, I can both understand and agree with him. But when I am left to infer that all this is right on romantic principles, I confess that those principles become too romantic for my conception. If Perdita may be born and married on the stage, why may not Webster's Duchess of Malfy lie-in between the acts, and produce a fine family of tragic children? Her Grace actually does so in Webster's drama, and he is a poet of some genius, though it is not quite so sufficient as Shakspeare's, to give a "sweet oblivious antidote" to such "perilous stuff." It is not, however, either in favour of Shakspeare's or of Webster's genius that we shall be called on to make allowance, if we justify in the drama the lapse of such a number of years as may change the apparent identity of an individual. If romantic unity is to

be so largely interpreted, the old Spanish dramas, where youths grow grey-beards upon the stage, the mysteries and moralities, and productions teeming with the wildest anachronism, might all come in with their grave or laughable claims to romantic legitimacy.

Nam sic
Et Laberi mimos ut pulchra poemata mirer.
HOR.

On a general view, I conceive it may be said that Shakspeare nobly and legitimately enlarged the boundaries of time and place in the drama; but, in extreme cases, I would rather agree with Cumberland, to wave all mention of his name in speaking of dramatic laws, than accept of those licences for art which are not art, and designate irregularity by the name of order.

CAMPBELL.[1]

[1] Specimens of English Poetry, vol. 1. These observations of Mr. Campbell on the genius of Shakspeare, and on one of his most remarkable violations of the unity of time, are the product of sound and unbiassed judgment, and form a necessary corrective of the somewhat too unqualified, and, I may say, systematic eulogy of Schlegel, and one or two other critics, who, in attempting to gift the poet with *undeviating* excellence in the mechanism and construction of all his plots, have assuredly gone rather too far.

No. III.

ON THE GENIUS OF SHAKSPEARE, AND ON HIS FOUR DRAMAS, MACBETH, OTHELLO, HAMLET, AND LEAR.

SHAKSPEARE alone is of no age. He speaks a language which thrills in our blood in spite of the separation of two hundred years. His thoughts, passions, feelings, strains of fancy,—all are of this day, as they were of his own; and his genius may be contemporary with the mind of every generation for a thousand years to come.—He, above all poets, looked upon men, and lived for mankind. His genius, universal in intellect and sympathy, could find, in no more bounded circumference, its proper sphere. It could not bear exclusion from any part of human existence. Whatever in nature and life was given to man, was given in contemplation and poetry to him also; and over the undimmed mirror of his mind passed all the shadows of our mortal world. Look through his plays, and tell what form of existence, what quality of spirit, he is most skilful to delineate? Which of all the manifold beings he has drawn, lives before our thoughts, our eyes, in most unpictured reality? Is it Othello, Shylock, Falstaff, Lear, the Wife of Macbeth, Imogen, Hamlet, Ariel? In none of the other great dramatists do we see any thing

like a perfected art. In their works, every thing, it is true, exists in some shape or other, which can be required in a drama taking for its interest the absolute interest of human life and nature; but, after all, may not the very best of their works be looked on as sublime masses of chaotic confusion, through which the elements of our moral being appear? It was Shakspeare, the most unlearned of all our writers, who first exhibited on the stage perfect models, perfect images of all human characters, and of all human events. We cannot conceive any skill that could from his great characters remove any defect, or add to their perfect composition. Except in him, we look in vain for the entire fulness, the self-consistency, and self-completeness, of perfect art. All the rest of our drama may be regarded rather as a testimony of the state of genius—of the state of mind of the country, full of great poetical disposition, and great tragic capacity and power—than as a collection of the works of an art. Of Shakspeare and Homer alone, it may be averred that we miss in them nothing of the greatness of nature. In all other poets we do; we feel the measure of their power, and the restraint under which it is held; but in Shakspeare and in Homer, all is free and unbounded as in nature; and as we travel along with them in a car drawn by celestial steeds, our view seems ever interminable as before, and still equally far off the glorious horizon.

"After thus speaking" of Shakspeare himself,

may we presume yet farther, and speak of his individual works? Although there is no one of them that does not bear marks of his unequalled hand —scarcely one which is not remembered by the strong affection of love and delight towards some of its characters,—yet to all his readers they seem marked by very different degrees of excellence, and a few are distinguished above all the rest. Perhaps the four that may be named, as those which have been to the popular feeling of his countrymen the principal plays of their great dramatist, and which would be recognised as his master-works by philosophical criticism, are *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Lear*. The first of these has the most entire tragic action of any of his plays. It has, throughout, one awful interest, which is begun, carried through, and concluded with the piece. This interest of the action is a perfect example of a most important dramatic unity, preserved entire. The matter of the interest is one which has always held a strong sway over human sympathy, though mingled with abhorrence, the rise and fall of ambition. Men look on the darings of this passion with strong sympathy, because it is one of their strongest inherent feelings—the aspiring of the mind through its consciousness of power shown in the highest forms of human life. But it is decidedly a historical, not a poetical interest. Shakspeare has made it poetical by two things chiefly—not the character of Macbeth, which is itself historical—but by the pre-

ternatural agencies with which the whole course of the story is involved, and by the character of Lady Macbeth. The illusion of the dagger and the sleep-walking may be added as individual circumstances tending to give a character of imagination to the whole play. The human interest of the piece is the acting of the purpose of ambition, and the fate which attends it—the high capacities of blinded desire in the soul, and the moral retribution which overrules the affairs of men. But the poetry is the intermingling of preternatural agency with the transactions of life—threads of events spun by unearthly hands—the scene of the cave which blends unreality with real life—the preparation and circumstances of midnight murder—the superhuman calmness of guilt, in its elated strength, in a woman's soul—and the dreaminess of mind which is brought on those whose spirits have drunk the cup of their lust. The language of the whole is perhaps more purely tragic than that of any other of Shakspeare's plays; it is simple, chaste, and strong—rarely breaking out into fanciful expression, but a vein of imagination always running through. The language of Macbeth himself is often exceedingly beautiful. Perhaps something may be owing to national remembrances and associations; but we have observed that, in Scotland at least, Macbeth produces a deeper, a more breathless, and a more perturbing passion, in the audience, than any other drama.

If Macbeth is the most perfect in the tragic

action of the story, the most perfect in tragic passion is *Othello*. There is nothing to determine unhappiness to the lives of the two principal persons. Their love begins auspiciously; and the renown, high favour, and high character of Othello, seem to promise a stability of happiness to himself and the wife of his affections. But the blood which had been scorched in the veins of his race, under the suns of Africa, bears a poison that swells up to confound the peace of the Christian marriage-bed. He is jealous; and the dreadful overmastering passion which disturbs the steadfastness of his own mind, overflows upon his life and her's, and consumes them from the earth. The external action of the play is nothing—the causes of events are none; the whole interest of the story, the whole course of the action, the causes of all that happens, live all in the breast of Othello. The whole destiny of those who are to perish lies in his passion. Hence the high tragic character of the play—showing one false illusory passion ruling and confounding all life. All that is below tragedy in the passion of love is taken away at once by the awful character of Othello, for such he seems to us to be designed to be. He appears never as a lover—but at once as a husband; and the relation of his love made dignified, as it is a husband's justification of his marriage, is also dignified, as it is a soldier's relation of his stern and perilous life. It is a courted, not a wooing, at least unconsciously-wooing love; and though full of tenderness, yet is

it but slightly expressed, as being solely the gentle affection of a strong mind, and in no wise a passion. "And I loved her, that she did pity them." Indeed he is not represented as a man of passion, but of stern, sedate, immoveable mood. "I have seen the cannon, that, like the devil, from his very arm puffed his own brother"—and can *he* be angry? Montalto speaks with the same astonishment, calling him respected for wisdom and gravity. Therefore, it is no love story. His love itself, as long as it is happy, is perfectly calm and serene, the protecting tenderness of a husband. It is not till it is disordered that it appears as a passion. Then is shown a power in contention with itself—a mighty being struck with death, and bringing up from all the depths of life convulsions and agonies. It is no exhibition of the power of the passion of love, but of the passion of life vitally wounded, and self-overmastering. What was his love? He had placed all his faith in good—all his imagination of purity, all his tenderness of nature upon one heart; and at once that heart seems to him an ulcer. It is that recoiling agony that shakes his whole body—that having confided with the whole power of his soul, he is utterly betrayed—that having departed from the pride and might of his life, which he held in his conquest and sovereignty over men, to rest himself upon a new and gracious affection, to build himself and his life upon one beloved heart,—having found a blessed affection, which he had passed through life without knowing,

—and having chosen, in the just and pure goodness of his will, to take that affection instead of all other hopes, desires, and passions, to live by,—that at once he sees it sent out of existence, and a damned thing standing in its place. It is then that he feels a forfeiture of all power, and a blasting of all good. If Desdemona had been really guilty, the greatness would have been destroyed, because his love would have been unworthy—false. But she is good, and his love is most perfect, just, and good. That a man should place his perfect love on a wretched thing, is miserably debasing, and shocking to thought; but that, loving perfectly and well, he should, by hellish human circumvention, be brought to distrust, and dread, and abjure his own perfect love, is most mournful indeed—it is the infirmity of our good nature, wrestling in vain with the strong powers of evil. Moreover, he would, had Desdemona been false, have been the mere victim of fate; whereas, he is now in a manner his own victim. His happy love was heroic tenderness; his injured love is terrible passion; and disordered power, engendered within itself to its own destruction, is the height of all tragedy. The character of Othello is perhaps the most greatly drawn, the most heroic of any of Shakspeare's actors; but it is, perhaps, that one also of which his reader last acquires the intelligence. The intellectual and warlike energy of his mind—his tenderness of affection—his loftiness of spirit—his frank, generous magnanimity—impetuosity like a thunderbolt, and

that dark fierce flood of boiling passion, polluting even his imagination—compose a character entirely original; most difficult to delineate, but perfectly delineated.

Hamlet might seem to be the intellectual offspring of Shakspeare's love.[m] He alone, of all his offspring, has Shakspeare's own intellect. But he has given him a moral nature that makes his character individual. Princely, gentle, and loving; full of natural gladness, but having a depth of sensibility which is no sooner touched by the harsh events of life than it is jarred, and the mind for ever overcome with melancholy. For intellect and sensibility blended throughout, and commensurate, and both ideally exalted and pure, are not able to pass through the calamity and trial of life: unless they are guarded by some angel from its shock, they perish in it, or undergo a worse change. The play is a singular example of a piece of great length, resting its interest upon the delineation of one character; for Hamlet, his discourses, and the changes of his mind, are all the play. The other persons, even his father's ghost, are important through him; and in himself, it is the

[m] There is great truth and no little acumen in this remark; for it may, without fear of contradiction, be asserted that the character of Hamlet is that of a man of very extraordinary and exalted genius, and the only instance, perhaps, on the stage of such a delineation, and of the whole interest of a play turning on the construction and aberrations of the mind of one individual.

variation of his mind, and not the varying events of his life, that affords the interest. In the representation, his celebrated soliloquy is perhaps the part of the play that is most expected, even by the common audience. His interview with his mother, of which the interest is produced entirely from his mind—for about her we care nothing—is in like manner remarkable by the sympathy it excites in those, for whom the most intellectual of Shakspeare's works would scarcely seem to have been written. This play is perhaps superior to any other in existence for unity in the delineation of character.

We have yet to speak of the most pathetic of the plays of Shakspeare—*Lear*. A story unnatural and irrational in its foundation, but at the same time a natural favourite of tradition, has become, in the hands of Shakspeare, a tragedy of surpassing grandeur and interest. He has seized upon that germ of interest which had already made the story a favourite of popular tradition, and unfolded it into a work for the passionate sympathy of all—young, old, rich and poor, learned and illiterate, virtuous and depraved. The majestic form of the kingly-hearted old man—the reverend head of the broken-hearted father—"a head so old and white as this"—the royalty from which he is deposed, but of which he can never be divested—the father's heart, which, rejected and trampled on by two children, and trampling on its one most young and duteous child, is, in the utmost degree, a father's

still—the two characters, father and king, so high to our imagination and love, blended in the reverend image of Lear—*both* in their destitution, yet *both* in their height of greatness—the spirit blighted and yet undepressed—the wits gone, and yet the moral wisdom of a good heart left unstained, almost unobscured—the wild raging of the elements, joined with human outrage and violence to persecute the helpless, unresisting, almost unoffending sufferer—and he himself in the midst of all imaginable misery and desolation, descanting upon himself, on the whirlwinds that drive around him, and then turning in tenderness to some of the wild motley association of sufferers among whom he stands—all this is not like what has been seen on any stage, perhaps in any reality; but it has made a world to our imagination about one single imaginary individual, such as draws the reverence and sympathy which should seem to belong properly only to living men. It is like the remembrance of some wild perturbed scene of real life. Every thing is perfectly woful in this world of wo. The very assumed madness of Edgar, which, if the story of Edgar stood alone, would be insufferable, and would utterly degrade him to us, seems, associated as he is with Lear, to come within the consecration of Lear's madness. It agrees with all that is brought together;—the night—the storms—the houselessness—Gloster with his eyes put out—the fool—the semblance of a madman, and Lear in his madness,—are all bound together by a strange

kind of sympathy, confusion in the elements of nature, of human society and the human soul. Throughout all the play, is there not sublimity felt amidst the continual presence of all kinds of disorder and confusion in the natural and moral world;—a continual consciousness of eternal order, law, and good? This it is that so exalts it in our eyes. There is more justness of intellect in Lear's madness than in his right senses—as if the indestructible divinity of the spirit gleamed at times more brightly through the ruins of its earthly tabernacle. The death of Cordelia and the death of Lear leave on our minds, at least, neither pain nor disappointment, like a common play ending ill; but, like all the rest, they show us human life involved in darkness, and conflicting with wild powers let loose to rage in the world;—a life which continually seeks peace, and which can only find its good in peace—tending ever to the depth of peace, but of which the peace is not here. The feeling of the play, to those who rightly consider it, is high and calm, because we are made to know, from and through those very passions which seem there convulsed, and that very structure of life and happiness that seems there crushed,—even in the law of those passions and that life, this eternal truth, that evil must not be, and that good must be. The only thing intolerable was, that Lear should, by the very truth of his daughter's love, be separated from her love; and his restoration to her love, and therewith to his own perfect mind, consummates all

that was essentially to be desired—a consummation, after which the rage and horror of mere matter-disturbing death seems vain and idle. In fact, Lear's killing the slave who was hanging Cordelia—bearing her dead in his arms—and his heart bursting over her—are no more than the full consummation of their re-united love; and there father and daughter lie in final and imperturbable peace. Cordelia, whom we at last see lying dead before us, and over whom we shed such floods of loving and approving tears, scarcely speaks or acts in the play at all: she appears but at the beginning and the end, is absent from all the impressive and memorable scenes; and to what she does say, there is not much effect given;—yet, by some divine power of conception in Shakspeare's soul, she always seems to our memory one of the principal characters; and while we read the play, she is continually present to our imagination. In her sister's ingratitude, her filial love is felt; in the hopelessness of the broken-hearted king, we are turned to that perfect hope that is reserved for him in her loving bosom; in the midst of darkness, confusion, and misery, her form is like a hovering angel, seen casting its radiance on the storm.

BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.[n]

[n] Vol. 5. pp. 217, 226, 7, 8, 9.

No. IV.

ON THE CHARACTER AND FEELINGS OF SHAKSPEARE.

It is in the minor pieces of Shakspeare that we are first introduced to a personal knowledge of the great poet and his feelings. When he wrote sonnets, it seems as if he had considered himself as more a poet than when he wrote plays; he was the manager of a theatre, and he viewed the drama as his business, on it he exerted all his intellect and power; but when he had feelings intense and secret to express, he had recourse to a form of writing with which his habits had rendered him less familiar. It is strange but delightful to scrutinize, in his short effusions, the character of Shakspeare.* In them we see that he who stood like a magician above the world, penetrating with one glance into all the depths, and mysteries, and perplexities of human character, and having power to call up into open day the darkest workings of the

* I am convinced, indeed, that if, in the present day, any fresh light is to be thrown on the character, and even on the circumstances of the life of Shakspeare, it must be from a very close and profound study of his Sonnets. A few years ago a work was advertised under the title of "Shakspeare his own Biographer," avowedly built on these materials; but, from some cause or other, it has not hitherto made its appearance.

human passions—that this great being was not deprived of any portion of his human sympathies by the elevation to which he was raised, but preserved, amidst all his stern functions, a heart overflowing with tenderness, purity, and love. His feelings are intense, profound, acute almost to selfishness; but he expresses them so briefly and modestly, as to form a strange contrast with most of those poets who write concerning themselves. For the right understanding of his dramatic works, these lyrics are of the greatest importance. They show us that in his dramas he very seldom speaks according to his own feelings or his own thoughts, but according to his knowledge. The world lay clear and distinct before his eyes, but between him and it there was a deep gulf fixed. He gives us a portrait of what he saw, without flattery or ornament, having the charm of unrivalled accuracy and truth. Were understanding, acuteness, and profoundness of thought, (in so far as these are necessary for the characterizing of human life,) to be considered as the first qualities of a poet, there is none worthy to be compared with Shakspeare. Other poets have endeavoured to transport us, at least for a few moments, into another and an ideal condition of mankind; but Shakspeare is the master of reality. He sets before us, with a truth that is often painful, man in his degraded state, in this corruption which penetrates and contaminates all his being, all that he does and suffers, all the thoughts and aspirations of his fallen spirit. In

this respect he may not unfrequently be said to be a satirical poet, and well indeed may the picture which he presents of human debasement, and the enigma of our being, be calculated to produce an effect far more deep and abiding than the whole body of splenetic and passionate revilers, whom we commonly call by the name of satiric poets. In the midst of all the bitterness of Shakspeare, we perceive continually glimpses of thoughts and recollections more pure than satirists partake in; meditation on the original height and elevation of man; the peculiar tenderness and noble-minded sentiment of a poet: the dark world of his representation is illuminated with the most beautiful rays of patriotic inspiration, serene philanthropy, and glowing love.

But even the youthful glow of love appears in his Romeo as the mere inspiration of death, and is mingled with the same sceptical and melancholy views of life which, in Hamlet, give to all our being an appearance of more than natural discord and perplexity, and which, in Lear, carry sorrow and passion into the utmost misery of madness. This poet, who externally seems to be most calm and temperate, clear and lively; with whom intellect seems everywhere to predominate; who, as we at first imagine, regards and represents every thing almost with coldness,—is found, if we examine into the internal feelings of his spirit, to be of all others the most deeply sorrowful and tragic.

Shakspeare regarded the drama as entirely a thing for the people, and at first treated it throughout as such. He took the popular comedy as he found it, and whatever enlargements and improvements he introduced into the stage, were all calculated and conceived, according to the peculiar spirit of his predecessors and of the audience in London. Even in the earliest of his tragic attempts, he takes possession of the whole superstitions of the vulgar, and mingles in his poetry not only the gigantic greatness of their rude traditions, but also the fearful, the horrible, and the revolting. All these, again, are blended with such representations and views of human debasement as passed, or still pass, with common spectators for wit, but were connected in the depths of his reflective and penetrating spirit, with the very different feelings of bitter contempt or sorrowful sympathy. He was not, in knowledge, far less in art, such as since the time of Milton it has been usual to represent him. But I believe that the inmost feelings of his heart, the depths of his peculiar, concentrated, and solitary spirit, could be agitated only by the mournful voice of nature. The feeling by which he seems to have been most connected with ordinary men is that of nationality. He has represented the heroic and glorious period of English history, during the conquests in France, in a series of dramatic pieces, which possess all the simplicity and liveliness of the ancient chronicles, but ap-

proach, in their ruling spirit of patriotism and glory, to the most dignified and effectual productions of the epic muse.[p]

In the works of Shakspeare, a whole world is unfolded. He who has once comprehended this, and been penetrated with its spirit, will not easily allow the effect to be diminished by the form, or listen to the cavils of those who are incapable of understanding the import of what they would criticise. The form of Shakspeare's writings will rather appear to him good and excellent, because in it his spirit is expressed and clothed, as it were, in a convenient garment.

FREDERICK SCHLEGEL.[q]

[p] No writer, I believe, has contributed so largely and effectively to the maintenance of national enthusiasm, and its almost necessary result, undaunted confidence and surpassing heroism, as Shakspeare.

[q] Lectures on the History of Literature, Ancient and Modern. Translated from the German. In two Volumes, Edinburgh, 1815. Vol. 2. p. 144. et seq.

No. V.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF SHAKSPEARE OVER THE HUMAN MIND.

SHAKSPEARE was the profoundest thinker, the wittiest, the airiest, the most fantastic spirit, (reconciling the extremes of ordinary natures,) that ever condescended to teach and amuse mankind. He plunged into the depths of speculation; he penetrated to the inner places of knowledge, plucking out the heart of the mystery; he soared to the stars; he trod the earth, the air, the waters. Every element yielded him rich tribute. He surveyed the substances and the spirits of each; he saw their stature, their power, their quality, and reduced them without an effort to his own divine command.

It is impossible to forget all that he has done for us, or the world that he has laid open. He was the true magician, before whom the astrologers and Hermetic sages were nothing, and the Arabian wizards grew pale. He did not, indeed, trace the Sybil's book, nor the Runic rhyme; nor did he drive back the raging waters or the howling winds; but his power stretched all over the human mind, from wisdom to fatuity, from joy to despair, and embraced all the varieties of our uncertain nature. He it was, at whose touch the cave of Prosper

opened and gave out its secrets. To *his* bidding, Ariel appeared. At *his* call, arose the witches and the earthy Caliban, the ghost who made "night hideous," the moonlight Fays, Titania, and Oberon, and the rest. *He* was the "so potent" master before whom bowed kings and heroes, and jewelled queens, men wise as the stars, and women fairer than the morning. All the vices of life were explained by him, and all the virtues; and the passions stood plain before him. From the cradle to the coffin he drew them all. He created, for the benefit of wide posterity, and for the aggrandizement of human nature; lifting earth to heaven, and revealing the marvels of this lower world, and piercing even the shadowy secrets of the grave.

There is, perhaps, no one person of any considerable rate of mind who does not owe something to this matchless poet. He is the teacher of all good—pity, generosity, true courage, love. His works alone (leaving mere science out of the question) contain, probably, more actual wisdom than the whole body of English learning. He is the text for the moralist and the philosopher. His bright wit is cut out "into little stars;" his solid masses of knowledge are meted out in morsels and proverbs; and, thus distributed, there is scarcely a corner which he does not illuminate, or a cottage which he does not enrich. His bounty is like the sea, which, though often unacknowledged, is every where felt; on mountains and plains and distant places, carrying its cloudy freshness through the

air, making glorious the heavens, and spreading verdure on the earth beneath.

It is because he has thus outshone all writers of all nations in dramatic skill, in fine knowledge of humanity, in sweetness, in pathos, in humour, in wit, and in poetry;—it is because he has subdued every passion to his use, and explored and made visible the inequalities and uttermost bounds of the human mind,—because he has embodied the mere nothings of the air, and made personal and probable the wildest anomalies of superstition,—because he has tried every thing, and failed in nothing,—that we bow down in silent admiration before him, and give ourselves up to a completer homage than we would descend to pay to any other created man.

RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW, Vol. 7th, pp. 380, 381.

No. VI.

ON SHAKSPEARE, AND ON THE CHARACTER OF HIS TRAGEDIES.

THERE are beauties of the first order to be found in Shakspeare, relating to every country and every period of time. His faults are those which belonged to the times in which he lived; and the singularities then so prevalent among the English, are still represented with the greatest success upon their theatres.

Shakspeare did not imitate the ancients; nor, like Racine, did he feed his genius upon the Grecian tragedies. He composed one piece upon a Greek subject, *Troilus and Cressida;* in which the manners in the time of Homer are not at all observed. He excelled infinitely more in those tragedies which were taken from Roman subjects. But history, and the Lives of Plutarch, which Shakspeare appears to have read with the utmost attention, are not purely a literary study; we may therein trace the man almost to a state of existence. When an author is solely penetrated with the models of the dramatic art of antiquity, and when he imitates imitations, he must of course have less originality: he cannot have that genius which draws from Nature; that immediate genius, if I may so express myself, which so particularly

characterizes Shakspeare. From the times of the Greeks down to this time, we see every species of literature derived one from another, and all arising from the same source. Shakspeare opened a new field of literature: it was borrowed, without doubt, from the general spirit and colour of the North; but it was Shakspeare who gave to the English literature its impulse, and to their dramatic art its character.

A nation which has carved out its liberty through the horrors of civil war, and whose passions have been strongly agitated, is much more susceptible of the emotion excited by Shakspeare, than that which is caused by Racine. When misfortune lies heavy and for a long time upon a nation, it creates a character, which even succeeding prosperity can never entirely efface. Shakspeare was the first who painted moral affliction in the highest degree: the bitterness of those sufferings of which he gives us the idea, might pass for the phantoms of imagination, if Nature did not recognise her own picture in them.

The ancients believed in a fatality, which came upon them with the rapidity of lightning, and destroyed them like a thunderbolt. The moderns, and more especially Shakspeare, found a much deeper source of emotion in a philosophical distress, which was often composed of irreparable misfortunes, of ineffectual exertions, and blighted hopes. But the ancients inhabited a world yet in its infancy, were in possession of but very few histo-

ries, and withal were so sanguine in respect to the future, that the scenes of distress painted by them could never be so heart-rending as those in the English tragedies.

The terror of death was a sentiment, the effects of which, whether from religion or from stoicism, was seldom displayed by the ancients. Shakspeare has represented it in every point of view: he makes us feel that dreadful emotion which chills the blood of him, who, in the full enjoyment of life and health, learns that death awaits him. In the tragedies of Shakspeare, the criminal and the virtuous, infancy and old age, are alike condemned to die, and express every emotion natural to such a situation. What tenderness do we feel, when we hear the complaints of Arthur, a child condemned to death by the order of King John; or when the assassin Tyrrel comes to relate to Richard the Third the peaceful slumber of the children of Edward? When a hero is painted just going to be deprived of his existence, the grandeur of his character, and the recollection of his achievements, excite the greatest interest; but when men of weak minds, and doomed to an inglorious destiny, are represented as condemned to perish,—such as Henry VI., Richard II., and King Lear,—the great debates of Nature between existence and non-existence absorb the whole attention of the spectators. Shakspeare knew how to paint with genius that mixture of physical emotions and moral reflections which are inspired by the ap-

proach of death, when no intoxicating passion deprives man of his intellectual faculties.

Another sentiment which Shakspeare alone knew how to render theatrical, was pity unmixed with admiration for those who suffer; pity for an insignificant being, and sometimes for a contemptible one. There must be an infinity of talent to be able to convey this sentiment from real life to the stage, and to preserve it in all its force; but when once it is accomplished, the effect which it produces is more nearly allied to reality than any other. It is for the man alone that we are interested, and not by sentiments which are often but a theatrical romance: it is by a sentiment so nearly approaching the impressions of life, that the illusion is still the greater.

Even when Shakspeare represents personages whose career has been illustrious, he draws the interest of the spectators towards them by sentiments purely natural. The circumstances are grand, but the men differ less from other men than those in the French tragedies.[r] Shakspeare makes you penetrate entirely into the glory which he paints: in listening to him, you pass through all

[r] It is this fidelity to nature, independent of all extrinsic circumstances, which has given to Shakspeare such a decided superiority over all other dramatic writers. Whatever may be the artificialities which surround his characters, we distinctly see, through the veil, the *human heart*. I would particularly point to the *Dramatis Personæ* of *Troilus and Cressida* as a striking proof, among many others, of this excellency.

the different shades and gradations which lead to heroism; and you arrive at the height without perceiving any thing unnatural.

The national pride of the English, that sentiment displayed in their jealous love of liberty, disposed them much less to enthusiasm for their chiefs than that spirit of chivalry which existed in the French monarchy. In England, they wish to recompense the services of a good citizen; but they have no turn for that unbounded ardour which existed in the habits, the institutions, and the character of the French. That haughty repugnance to unlimited obedience, which at all times characterised the English nation, was probably what inspired their national poet with the idea of assailing the passions of his audience by pity rather than by admiration. The tears which were given by the French to the sublime characters of their tragedies, the English author drew forth for private sufferings; for those who were forsaken; and for such a long list of the unfortunate, that we cannot entirely sympathize with Shakspeare's sufferers without acquiring also some of the bitter experience of real life.

But if he excelled in exciting pity, what energy appeared in his terror! It was from the crime itself that he drew dismay and fear. It may be said of crimes painted by Shakspeare, as the Bible says of Death, that he is the KING OF TERRORS. How skilfully combined are the remorse and the super-

stition which increases with that remorse, in Macbeth.

Witchcraft is in itself much more terrible in its theatrical effect than the most absurd dogmas of religion. That which is unknown, or created by supernatural intelligence, awakens fear and terror to the highest degree. In every religious system, terror is carried only to a certain length, and is always at least founded upon some motive. But the chaos of magic bewilders the mind. Shakspeare, in "Macbeth," admits of fatality, which was necessary in order to procure a pardon for the criminal; but he does not, on account of this fatality, dispense with the philosophical gradations of the sentiments of the mind. This piece would be still more admirable if its grand effects were produced without the aid of the marvellous, although this marvellous consists, as one may say, only of phantoms of the imagination, which are made to appear before the eyes of the spectators. They are not mythological personages bringing their fictitious laws or their uninteresting nature amongst the interests of men: they are the marvellous effects of dreams, when the passions are strongly agitated. There is always something philosophical in the supernatural employed by Shakspeare.* When the

* Without this intermixture, which is necessary to give a metaphysical possibility to the interference, the supernatural would degenerate into the puerile. The thrilling terror, which Shakspeare beyond all others knows how to communicate,

witches announce to Macbeth that he is to wear the crown, and when they return to repeat their prediction at the very moment when he is hesitating to follow the bloody counsel of his wife, who cannot see that it is the interior struggle of ambition and virtue which the author meant to represent under those hideous forms?

But he had not recourse to these means in "Richard III.," and yet he has painted him more criminal still than Macbeth; but his intention was to pourtray a character without any of those involuntary emotions, without struggles, without remorse; cruel and ferocious as the savage beasts which range the forests, and not as a man who, though at present guilty, had once been virtuous. The deep recesses of crimes were opened to the eyes of Shakspeare, and he descended into the gloomy abyss to observe their torments.

In England, the troubles and civil commotions which preceded their liberty, and which were always occasioned by their spirit of independence, gave rise much oftener than in France to great crimes and great virtues. There are in the English history many more tragical situations than in that of the French;[1] and nothing opposes their exercising their talents upon national subjects.

Almost all the literature of Europe began with

depends, in a great measure, upon this skilful blending of the philosophical with the superhuman.

[1] This can scarcely be said when we recollect the horrors of the late Revolution.

affectation. The revival of letters having commenced in Italy, the countries where they were afterwards introduced naturally imitated the Italian style. The people of the North were much sooner enfranchized than the French in this studied mode of writing; the traces of which may be perceived in some of the ancient English poets, as Waller, Cowley, and others. Civil wars and a spirit of philosophy have corrected this false taste; for misfortune, the impressions of which contain but too much variety, excludes all sentiments of affectation, and reason banishes all expressions that are deficient in justness.

Nevertheless, we find in Shakspeare a few of those studied turns connected even with the most energetic pictures of the passions. There are some imitations of the faults of Italian literature in "Romeo and Juliet;" but how nobly the English poet rises from this miserable style!—how well does he know how to describe love, even in the true spirit of the North!

In "Othello," love assumes a very different character from that which it bears in "Romeo and Juliet." But how grand, how energetic it appears! how beautifully Shakspeare has represented what forms the tie of the different sexes, *courage* and *weakness!* When Othello protests before the senate of Venice that the only art which he had employed to win the affection of Desdemona were the perils to which he had been exposed,* how

* What charming verses are those which terminate the jus-

every word he utters is felt by the female sex; their hearts acknowledge it all to be true. They know that it is not flattery in which consists the powerful art of men to make themselves beloved, but the kind protection which they may afford the timid object of their choice: the glory which they may reflect upon their feeble life, is their most irresistible charm.

The manners and customs of the English relating to the existence of women, were not yet settled in the time of Shakspeare; political troubles had been a great hindrance to social habits. The rank which women held in tragedy was then absolutely at the will of the author; therefore Shakspeare, in speaking of them, sometimes uses the most noble language that can be inspired by love, and at other times the lowest taste that was popular. This genius, given by passion, was inspired by it, as the priests were by their gods: they gave out oracles when they were agitated, but were no more than men when calm.

Those pieces taken from the English history, such as the two upon Henry IV., that upon Henry V., and the three upon Henry VI., have an unli-

tification of Othello, and which La Harpe has so ably translated into truth!

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd;
And I lov'd her, that she did pity them.

SHAKSPEARE.

Elle aima mes malheurs, et j'aimai sa pitie.

LA HARPE.

mited success in England; nevertheless, I believe them to be much inferior in general to his tragedies of invention, "King Lear," "Macbeth," "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet," &c. The irregularities of time and place are much more remarkable. In short, Shakspeare gives up to the popular taste in these more than in any other of his works. The discovery of the press necessarily diminished the condescension of authors to the national taste: they paid more respect to the general opinion of Europe; and though it was of the greatest importance that those pieces which were to be played should meet with success at the representation, since a means was found out of extending their fame to other nations, the writers took more pains to shun those illusions and pleasantries which could please only the people of their own nation. The English, however, were very backward in submitting to the general good taste: their liberty being founded more upon national pride than philosophical ideas, they rejected every thing that came from strangers, both in literature and politics.

Before it would be possible to judge of the effects of an English tragedy which might be proper for the French stage, an examination remains to be made, which is, to distinguish in the pieces of Shakspeare that which was written to please the people; the real faults which he committed; and those spirited beauties which the

severe rules of the French tragedies exclude from their stage.

The crowd of spectators in England require that comic scenes should succeed tragic effects. The contrast of what is noble with that which is not, as I have observed before, always produces a disagreeable impression upon men of taste. A noble style must have shades; but a too glaring opposition is nothing more than fantasticalness. That play upon words, those licentious equivocations, popular tales, and that string of proverbs which are handed down from generation to generation, and are, as one may say, the patrimonial ideas of the common people,—all these are applauded by the multitude, and censured by reason. These have no connection with the sublime effects which Shakspeare drew from simple words and common circumstances artfully arranged, which the French most absurdly would fear to bring upon their stage.

Shakspeare, when he wrote the parts of vulgar minds in his tragedies, sheltered himself from the judgment of taste by rendering himself the object of popular admiration: he then conducted himself like an able chief, but not like a good writer.

The people of the North existed, during many centuries, in a state that was at once both social and barbarous; which left, for a long time, the vestiges of the *rude* and *ferocious*. Traces of this recollection are to be found in many of Shakspeare's characters, which are painted in the style that was most admired in those ages, in which

they only lived for combats, physical power, and military courage.

We may also perceive in Shakspeare some of the ignorance of his century with regard to the principles of literature; his powers are superior to the Greek tragedies for the philosophy of the passions, and the knowledge of mankind;* but he was inferior to many with regard to the perfection of the art. Shakspeare may be reproached with incoherent images, prolixity, and useless repetitions; but the attention of the spectators in those days was too easily captivated, that the author should be very strict with himself. A dramatic poet, to attain all the perfection his talents will permit, must neither be judged by impaired age, nor by youth, who find the source of emotion within themselves.

The French have often condemned the scenes

* Among the great number of philosophical traits which are remarked even in the least celebrated works of Shakspeare, there is one with which I was singularly struck. In that piece entitled *Measure for Measure*, Lucien, the friend of Claudius, and brother to Isabella, presses her to go and sue for his pardon to the Governor Angelo, who had condemned this brother to die. Isabella, young and timid, answers, that she fears it would be useless; that Angelo was too much irritated, and would be inflexible, &c. Lucien insists, and says to her,

——— Our doubts are traitors,
And make us lose the good we might win
By fearing to attempt.

Who can have lived in a revolution, and not be sensible of the truth of these words?

of horror represented by Shakspeare; not because they excited an emotion too strong, but because they sometimes destroyed the theatrical illusion. They certainly appear to me susceptible of criticism. In the first place, there are certain situations which are only frightful; and the bad imitators of Shakspeare wishing to represent them, produced nothing more than a disagreeable invention, without any of the pleasures which the tragedy ought to produce; and again, there are many situations really affecting in themselves, which nevertheless require stage effect to amuse the attention, and of course the interest.

When the governor of the tower, in which the young Arthur is confined, orders a red-hot iron to be brought, to put out his eyes; without speaking of the atrociousness of such a scene, there must pass upon the stage an action, the imitation of which is impossible; and the attention of the audience is so much taken up with the execution of it, that the moral effect is quite forgotten.

The character of Caliban, in the "Tempest," is singularly original; but the almost animal figure, which his dress must give him, turns the attention from all that is philosophical in the conception of this part.

In reading "Richard III.," one of the beauties is what he himself says of his natural deformity. One can feel that the horror which he causes ought to act reciprocally upon his own mind, and

render it yet more atrocious.—Nevertheless, can there be any thing more difficult in an elevated style, or more nearly allied to ridicule, than the imitation of an ill-shaped man upon the stage? Every thing in nature may interest the mind; but upon the stage, the illusion of sight must be treated with the most scrupulous caution, or every serious effect will be irreparably destroyed.

Shakspeare also represented physical sufferings much too often. Philoctetes is the only example of any theatrical effect being produced by it; and, in this instance, it was the heroic cause of his wounds that fixed the attention of the spectators. Physical sufferings may be related, but cannot be represented. It is not the author, but the actor, who cannot express himself with grandeur; it is not the ideas, but the senses, which refuse to lend their aid to this style of imitation.

In short, one of the greatest faults which Shakspeare can be accused of, is his want of simplicity in the intervals of his sublime passages. When he is not exalted, he is affected; he wanted the art of sustaining himself, that is to say, of being as natural in his scenes of transition, as he was in the grand movements of the soul.

Otway, Rowe, and some other English poets, Addison excepted, all wrote their tragedies in the style of Shakspeare;[a] and Otway's "Venice Pre-

[a] This is a great mistake; for assuredly neither Otway nor Rowe can be said, either as to manner or diction, to have ap-

served" almost equalled his model. But the two most truly tragical situations ever conceived by men, were first portrayed by Shakspeare:—madness caused by misfortune, and misfortune abandoned to solitude and itself.

Ajax is furious; Orestes is pursued by the anger of the gods; Phœdra is consumed by the fever of love; but Hamlet, Ophelia, and King Lear, with different situations and different characters, have all, nevertheless, the same marks of derangement; it is distress alone that speaks in them; every idea of common life disappears before this predominant one: they are alive to nothing but affection; and this affecting delirium of a suffering object seems to set it free from that timidity which forbids us to expose ourselves without reserve to the eyes of pity. The spectators would perhaps refuse their sympathy to voluntary complaints; but they readily yield to the emotion which arises from a grief that cannot answer for itself. Insanity, as portrayed by Shakspeare, is the finest picture of the shipwreck of moral nature, when the storm of life surpasses its strength.

MADAME DE STAEL HOLSTEIN.[v]

proached the style of Shakspeare. Had they such an object in view, which I do not believe, they must be pronounced to have egregiously failed.

[v] Influence of Literature upon Society. Translated from the French of Madame De Stael Holstein. Second edition. In 2 vols. London: printed for Henry Colburn. Vol. 1. p. 288 to p. 305.

No. VII.

ON SHAKSPEARE, AND ON THE CHARACTER OF HIS COMEDIES.

AMONGST English *comic* writers, Shakspeare must occupy not only the first, but the highest place. His dramas, after a lapse of two centuries, are still gazed at with unabated ardour by the populace, are still read with admiration by the scholar. They interest the old and the young, the gallery and the pit, the people and the critic. At their representation appetite is never palled, expectation never disappointed. The changes of fashion have not cast him into shade, the variations of language have not rendered him obsolete. His plots are lively, and command attention; his characters are still new and striking; and his wit is fertile even to exuberance. Perhaps there never was a drama which so happily combined tender sentiment with *comic* force as *As You Like It;* there is scarcely a character in it which fails to interest. Adam and Jaques are truly original; and even the buffoonery of the clown is of a superior cast. In the *Merchant of Venice* the unity of action is somewhat violated by a double plot, but perhaps two plots were never so happily combined as in this play; and the one rises so naturally out of the other, that not the smallest confusion is pro-

duced. The comic scenes pleasantly relieve the mind from the effect produced by the serious. The conclusion is unexpected, and the effect of the whole is truly happy. Gratiano appears to me a character which Shakspeare only could have penned; though, from the little interest which he has in the plot, he is less noticed than he would have been for his sportive wit, had he been of more importance to the main action. Perhaps the *Merry Wives of Windsor* is one of the most regular of Shakspeare's comedies; and I scarcely know a play that comes more completely under that description. The principal character, Falstaff, is, however, scarcely so well depicted as in Henry the Fourth. In the scenes with the Prince, when debauchery and cheating are the themes, the old knight seems more in his proper element than in his rencounter with ladies. *Much Ado About Nothing*, though the subject in some measure justifies the title, is yet abundant in wit and pleasantry; and *Measure for Measure* and the *Twelfth Night* are truly interesting. The *Winter's Tale* is the most irregular of our author's comedies: there the unity of time is indeed violated beyond all bounds; yet it contains some exquisite strokes of nature and poetry, and many pleasant playful scenes. Of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream* it is difficult to judge by any of the rules of criticism; it is in every point of view a most extraordinary piece, and I confess I should like to see it well performed. The scenes between Bottom, Quince,

and their company of players, are exquisitely humorous.

GREGORY.*

* Letters on Literature, Taste, and Composition, vol. 2. p. 252 et seq. It would be difficult to compress into a shorter compass a more eloquent and just description of the influence of the dramas of Shakspeare on all ranks and ages, than what the opening of this number affords us.

No. VIII.

ON THE FAME AND ACQUIREMENTS OF SHAKSPEARE.

SHAKSPEARE is the pride of his nation. A late poet has, with propriety, called him the genius of the British isles. He was the idol of his contemporaries; and after the interval of puritanical fanaticism which commenced in a succeeding age, and put an end to every thing like liberal knowledge; after the reign of Charles the Second, during which his works were either not acted, or very much disfigured, his fame began to revive with more than its original brightness towards the beginning of the last century; and since that period it has increased with the progress of time, and for centuries to come,—I speak with the greatest confidence,—it will continue to gather strength, like an Alpine *avalanche,* at every period of its descent. As an important earnest of the future extension of his fame, we may allude to the enthusiasm with which he was naturalised in Germany the moment that he was known. The language, and the impossibility of translating him with fidelity, will be for ever, perhaps, an invincible obstacle to his general diffusion in the South of Europe.* In

* This impossibility extends also to France; for it must not be supposed that a literal translation can ever be a faithful one.

England, the greatest actors vie with each other in the characters of Shakspeare; the printers in splendid editions of his works; and the painters in transferring his scenes to the canvas. Like Dante, Shakspeare has received the indispensable but cumbersome honour of being treated like a classical author of antiquity.

The ignorance or learning of our poet has been the subject of endless controversy, and yet it is a matter of the easiest determination. Shakspeare was poor in dead learning, but he possessed a fulness of living and applicable knowledge. He knew Latin, and even something of Greek, though not, probably, enough to read the writers with ease in the original language. Of the modern languages, the French and Italian, he had also but a superficial acquaintance. The general direction of his inclination was not towards the collection of words but of facts. He had a very extensive acquaintance with English books, original and translated: we may safely affirm that he had read all that his language then contained which could be of any use to him in any of his poetical objects. He was sufficiently intimate with mythology to employ it in the only manner he wished, as a symbolical ornament. He had formed the most correct notions of the spirit of ancient history, and more particularly of that of the Romans; and the history

Mrs. Montagu has sufficiently shown how wretchedly Voltaire translated some passages of Hamlet, and the first acts of Julius Cæsar, into rhymeless alexandrines.

of his own country was familiar to him even in detail. Fortunately for him, it had not yet been treated in a diplomatic and pragmatical, but merely in the chronicle style; that is, it had not yet assumed the appearance of dry investigations respecting the developement of political relations, diplomatical transactions, finances, &c. but exhibited a visible image of the living and moving of an age full of distinguished deeds. Shakspeare was an attentive observer of nature; he knew the technical language of mechanics and artisans; he seems to have been well travelled in the interior of England, and to have been a diligent inquirer of navigators respecting other countries; and he was most accurately acquainted with all the popular usages, opinions, and traditions, which could be of use in poetry.

The proofs of his ignorance, on which the greatest stress is laid, are a few geographical blunders and anachronisms. Because in a comedy founded on a tale, he makes ships land in Bohemia, he has been the subject of laughter. But I conceive that we should be very unjust towards him, were we to conclude that he did not, as well as ourselves, possess the valuable but by no means difficult knowledge that Bohemia is no where bounded by the sea. He could never, in that case, have looked into a map of Germany, whereas he describes the maps of both Indies with the discoveries of the latest navigators.* In such matters Shakspeare is

* Twelfth Night, or What You Will—Act 3. Sc. 2.

only faithful in the historical subjects of his own country. In the novels on which he worked, he avoided disturbing his audience to whom they were known, by the correction of errors in secondary things. The more wonderful the story, the more it ranged in a purely poetical region, which he transfers at will to an indefinite distance. These plays, whatever names they bear, take place in the true land of romance, and in the century of wonderful love stories. He knew well that in the forest of Ardennes there were neither the lions and serpents of the Torrid Zone, nor the shepherdesses of Arcadia; but he transferred both to it, because the design and import of his picture required them. Here he considered himself entitled to the greatest liberties. He had not to do with a petty hypercritical age like ours, which is always seeking in poetry for something else than poetry; his audience entered the theatre, not to learn true chronology, geography, and natural history, but to witness a vivid exhibition. I undertake to prove that Shakspeare's anachronisms are, for the most part, committed purposely, and after great consideration. It was frequently of importance to him to bring the subject exhibited, from the back ground of time quite near to us. Hence, in Hamlet, though avowedly an old northern story, there prevails the tone of modish society, and in every respect the costume of the most recent period. Without those circumstantialities, it would not have been allowable to make a philosophical

inquirer of Hamlet, on which however the sense of the whole is made to rest. On that account he mentions his education at a university, though in the age of the historical Hamlet there was not yet any university. He makes him study at Wittenberg, and no selection could be more suitable. The name was very popular: from the story of Dr. Faustus of Wittenberg, it was wonderfully well known; it was of particular celebrity in protestant England, as Luther had taught and written there shortly before; and the very name must have immediately suggested the idea of freedom in thinking. I cannot even consider it an anachronism that Richard the Third should speak of Machiavel. The word is here used altogether proverbially: the contents of the book of the prince have been in existence ever since the existence of tyrants; Machiavel was merely the first to commit them to writing.

AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL.*

* Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature. Translated from the original German by John Black. In two Volumes. Vol. 1. pp. 102, 103, 117, 118, 119, 120.

No. IX.

ON THE NATURAL STYLE OF SHAKSPEARE AS CONTRASTED WITH THE ROMANTIC AND BURLESQUE.

THERE are three principal schools in the poetry of modern European nations, the romantic, the burlesque, and the natural. On the first revival of poetry, the minds of men perhaps universally took a bent towards the former: we had nothing but Rowlands and Arthurs, Sir Guys, and Sir Tristram, and Paynim and Christian knights. There was danger that nature would be altogether shut out from the courts of Apollo. The senses of barbarians are rude, and require a strong and forcible impulse to put them in motion. The first authors of the humorous and burlesque tales of modern times were perhaps sensible of this error in the romance writers, and desirous to remedy it. But they frequently fell into an opposite extreme, and that from the same cause. They deliver us, indeed, from the monotony produced by the perpetual rattling of armour, the formality of processions, and tapestry, and cloth of gold, and the eternal straining after supernatural adventures. But they lead us into squalid scenes, the coarse buffoonery of the ale-house, and the offensive manners engendered by dishonesty and intempe-

rance. Between the one and the other of these classes of poetry, we may find things analogous to the wild and desperate toys of Salvator Rosa, and to the boors of Teniers, but nothing that should remind us of the grace of Guido, or of the soft and simple repose of Claude Lorraine.

The Decamerone of Boccaccio seems to be the first work of modern times which was written entirely on the principle of a style, simple, unaffected, and pure. Chaucer, who wrote precisely at the same period, was the fellow-labourer of Boccaccio. He has declared open war against the romance manner in his Rime of Sire Thopas. His Canterbury Tales are written with an almost perpetual homage to nature. The Troilus and Creseide, though a tale of ancient times, treats almost solely of the simple and genuine emotions of the human heart.

Boccaccio and Chaucer, it might be supposed, would have succeeded in banishing the swelling and romantic style from the realms of poetry. We might have imagined that, as knowledge and civilisation grew, the empire of nature would have continually become more firmly established. But this was not the case. These eminent writers rose too high beyond their contemporaries, and reached to refinements that their successors could not understand. Pulci and Boiardo took the romantic style under their protection in the following century; and, by the splendour of their talents, and the treasures of their fancy, bestowed upon it

extensive and lasting empire.—Ariosto and Tasso adopted and carried to perfection the style of Pulci and Boiardo. Taste and literature had made no advances in England in the fifteenth century; and, in the sixteenth and early part of the seventeenth, our countrymen resorted for models principally to Italy. The Earl of Surry and his contemporaries were the introducers of the Italian school in this island. Spenser in his Faerie Queen combined at once all the imperfections of the allegorical and the romantic. Even the transcendent genius of Milton formed itself upon these originals; and, however we may adore the wonders of his invention, impartial criticism must acknowledge that he studied much in the school of the artificial, the colossal, and the wild, and little in that of nature.

It is incumbent upon us, however, not to treat the romantic style with too undiscriminating a severity. The fault was in thinking this the only style worthy of an elevated genius, or in thinking it the best. It has its appropriate and genuine recommendations. It is lofty, enthusiastic, and genial and cherishing to the powers of imagination. Perhaps every man of a truly poetical mind will be the better for having passed a short period in this school. And it may further safely be affirmed that every man of a truly poetical mind, who was reduced to make his choice between the school of coarse, burlesque, and extravagant humour, such as that of Hudibras for example, and the school of extravagant heroism and chivalry, such as that

of Tasso, would decide for the latter. The first chills and contracts, as it were, the vessels and alleys of the heart, and leaves us with a painful feeling of self-degradation. The second expands and elevates the soul, and fills the mind of the reader with generous pride, complacence in the powers he feels, and a warm and virtuous ardour to employ them for the advantage of others.

It is time that we should quit the consideration of these two less glorious spheres of human genius, and turn back to the temple of Nature, where Shakspeare for ever stands forth the high priest and the sovereign. The portraits drawn by those who have studied with success in her school, are dishonoured by being called portraits; they are themselves originals above all exception or challenge. The representations drawn in the romantic or the burlesque style may be to a great degree faithful exhibitions of what has actually existed; but, if they are, at least they exhibit a nature, vitiated, distorted, and, so to express the idea, denaturalised. The artificial and preconcerted is only shown, and those fainter and evanescent touches, by which every man betrays the kind to which he belongs, are lost. The portraits of Shakspeare, on the other hand, abound in, and may almost be said to be made up of these touches. In his characters we see the habits and prejudices of the man, and see, as through a transparent medium, how every accident that befals him acts upon his habits, his prejudices, and upon those

passions which are common to us all. How precisely is this the case with Justice Shallow! How completely are the starts and sallies of Hotspur, his repetitions, the torrent of his anger, his fiery temper, and his images drawn often from the most familiar and ordinary life,—how completely are they the very man that the poet desired to present to us! Shakspeare does not describe, he does seem to imagine the personages of his scene; he waves his magic wand, and the personages themselves appear, and act over again, at his command, the passions, the impressions, and the sorrows of their former life. The past is present before us.

GODWIN.[7]

[7] Life of Chaucer, Vol. 4. p. 189. It has been justly observed by Mr. Godwin, that what comes nearest to the pre-eminence of Shakspeare in the natural style, is the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales of Chaucer, the Don Quixote of Cervantes, the Sir Roger de Coverley of Addison, the Lovelace of Richardson, the Parson Adams of Fielding, the Walter Shandy of Sterne, and the Hugh Strap of Smollet.

No. X.

ON THE ART OF SHAKSPEARE.

To ME Shakspeare appears a profound artist, and not a blind and wildly-luxuriant genius. I consider, generally speaking, all that has been said on this subject as a mere fabulous story, a blind and extravagant error. In other arts the assertion refutes itself; for in them acquired knowledge is an indispensable condition before any thing can be performed. But even in such poets, as are usually given out for careless pupils of nature, without any art or school discipline, I have always found, on a nearer consideration, when they have really produced works of excellence, a distinguished cultivation of the mental powers, practice in art, and views worthy in themselves and maturely considered. This applies to Homer as well as Dante. The activity of genius is, it is true, natural to it, and in a certain sense unconscious; and consequently the person who possesses it is not always at the moment able to render an account of the course which he may have pursued; but it by no means follows that the thinking power had not a great share in it. It is from the very rapidity and certainty of the mental process, from the utmost clearness of understanding, that thinking in a poet is not perceived as something abstracted, does not

wear the appearance of meditation. That idea of poetical inspiration, which many lyrical poets have brought into circulation, as if they were not in their senses, and like Pythia, when possessed by the divinity, delivered oracles unintelligible to themselves (a mere lyrical invention), is least of all applicable to dramatic composition, one of the productions of the human mind which requires the greatest exercise of thought. It is admitted that Shakspeare has reflected, and deeply reflected, on character and passion, on the progress of events and human destinies, on the human constitution, on all the things and relations of the world; this is an admission which must be made, for one alone of thousands of his maxims would be a sufficient refutation of whoever should attempt to deny it. So that it was only then respecting the structure of his own pieces that he had no thought to spare? This he left to the dominion of chance, which blew together the atoms of Epicurus? But supposing that he had, without the higher ambition of acquiring the approbation of judicious critics and posterity, without the love of art which endeavours at self-satisfaction in a perfect work, merely laboured to please the unlettered crowd; this very object alone, and the theatrical effect, would have led him to bestow attention to the conduct of his pieces. For does not the impression of a drama depend in an especial manner on the relation of the parts to each other? And however beautiful a scene may be in itself, will it not be at once re-

probated by spectators merely possessed of plain sense, who give themselves up to nature, whenever it is at variance with what they are led to expect at that particular place, and destroys the interest which they have already begun to take? The comic intermixtures may be considered as a sort of interlude for the purpose of refreshing the spectators after the straining of their minds in following the more serious parts, if no better purpose can be found for them; but in the progress of the main action, in the concatenation of the events, the poet must, if possible, display even more superiority of understanding than in the composition of individual character and situations, otherwise he would be like the conductor of a puppet-show, who has confused the wires, so that the puppets, from their mechanism, undergo quite different movements from those which he actually intended.

The English critics are unanimous in their praise of the truth and uniform consistency of his characters, of his heart-rending pathos and his comic wit. Moreover, they extol the beauty and sublimity of his separate descriptions, images, and expressions. This last is the most superficial and cheap mode of criticising works of art. Johnson compares him, who should endeavour to recommend this poet by passages unconnectedly torn from his works, to the pedant in Hierocles, who exhibited a brick as a sample of his house. And yet he himself speaks so

little, and so very unsatisfactorily, of the pieces considered as a whole! Let any man, for instance, bring together the short characters which he gives at the close of each play, and see if the aggregate will amount to that sum of admiration which he himself, at his outset, has stated as the correct standard for the appreciation of the poet. It was, generally speaking, the prevailing tendency of the time which preceded our own, a tendency displayed also in physical science, to consider what is possessed of life as a mere accumulation of dead parts, to separate what exists only in connection, and cannot otherwise be conceived, instead of penetrating to the central point, and viewing all the parts as so many irradiations from it. Hence, nothing is so rare as a critic who can elevate himself to the contemplation of an extensive work of art. Shakspeare's compositions, from the very depth of purpose displayed in them, have been exposed to the misfortune of being misunderstood. Besides, this prosaical species of criticism applies always the poetical form to the details of execution; but in so far as the plan of the piece is concerned, it never looks for more than the logical connection of causes and effects, or some partial and trivial moral by way of application; and all that cannot be reconciled to this is declared a superfluous, or even a detrimental, addition. On these principles we must equally strike out the most of the choral songs of the Greek tragedies, which also contribute nothing to the developement

of the action, but are merely an harmonious echo of the impressions aimed at by the poet. In this they altogether mistake the rights of poetry, and the nature of the romantic drama, which, for the very reason that it is and ought to be picturesque, requires richer accompaniments and contrasts for its main groupes. In all art and poetry, but more especially in the romantic, the fancy lays claims to be considered as an independent mental power governed according to its own laws.

In an essay on *Romeo and Juliet*,* written a number of years ago, I went through the whole of the scenes in their order, and demonstrated the inward necessity of each with reference to the whole; I showed why such a particular circle of characters and relations was placed around the two lovers; I explained the signification of the mirth here and there scattered, and justified the use of the occasional heightening given to the poetical colours. From all this it seemed to follow unquestionably, that with the exception of a few plays of wit now become unintelligible or foreign to the present taste, (imitations of the tone of society of that day,) nothing could be taken away, nothing added, nothing otherwise arranged, without mutilating and disfiguring the perfect work. I should be ready to undertake the same thing in

* In the first volume of *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, published by my brother and myself.

good account of the Salic law, though a much worse has been given by many antiquaries. But he who reads the *Archbishop of Canterbury's* speech in *Henry the Fifth*, and who shall afterwards say that Shakspeare was not a man of great reading and information, and who loved the thing itself, is a person whose opinion I would not ask or trust upon any matter of investigation." Then, was all this reading, all this information, all this knowledge of our great dramatist, a mere *rudis indigestaque moles?* Very far from it. Method, we have seen, demands a knowledge of the relations which things bear to each other, or to the observer, or to the state and apprehensions of the hearers. In all and each of these was Shakspeare so deeply versed, that in the personages of a play, he seems "to mould his mind as some incorporeal material alternately into all their various forms." In every one of his various characters we still feel ourselves communing with the same human nature. Every where we find individuality; no where mere portrait. The excellence of his productions consists in a happy union of the universal with the particular. But the universal is an *idea*. Shakspeare, therefore, studied mankind in the *idea* of the human race; and he followed out that idea into all its varieties by a *method* which never failed to guide his steps aright. Let us appeal to him, to illustrate by example the difference between a sterile and an exuberant mind, in respect to what we have ventured to call

the science of method. On the one hand observe *Mrs. Quickley's* relation of the circumstances of *Sir John Falstaff's* debt.* On the other hand consider the narration given by *Hamlet* to *Horatio*, of the occurrences during his proposed transportation to England, and the events that interrupted his voyage.*

If, overlooking the different value of the matter in these two narrations, we consider only the form, it must be confessed that both are *immethodical*. We have asserted that method results from a balance between the passive impression received from outward things, and the internal inactivity of the mind in reflecting and generalising; but neither *Hamlet* nor the *Hostess* hold this balance accurately. In *Mrs. Quickley*, the memory alone is called into action; the objects and events recur in the narration in the same order, and with the same accompaniments, however accidental or impertinent, as they had first occurred to the narrator. The necessity of taking breath, the efforts of recollection, and the abrupt rectification of its failures, produce all her pauses, and constitute most of her connexions. But when we look to the *Prince of Denmark's* recital, the case is widely different. Here the events, with the circumstances of time and place, are all stated with equal compression and rapidity; not one introduced which could have been omitted without injury to

* Henry IV. Part 1. Act 2. Sc. 1. * Act 5. Sc. 2.

the intelligibility of the whole process. If any tendency is discoverable, as far as the mere facts are in question, it is to omission; and accordingly the reader will observe that the attention of the narrator is called back to one material circumstance, which he was hurrying by, by a direct question from the friend (HOW WAS THIS SEALED?) to whom the story is communicated. But by a trait which is indeed peculiarly characteristic of *Hamlet's* mind, ever disposed to generalise, and meditative to excess, all the digressions and enlargements consist of reflections, truths, and principles of general and permanent interest, either directly expressed or disguised in playful satire.

Instances of the want of generalisation are of no rare occurrence; and the narration of Shakspeare's *Hostess* differs from those of the ignorant and unthinking in ordinary life, only by its superior humour, the poet's own gift and infusion, not by its want of method, which is not greater than we often meet with in that class of minds of which she is the dramatic representative. Nor will the excess of generalisation and reflection have escaped our observation in real life, though the great poet has more conveniently supplied the illustrations. In attending too exclusively to the relations which the past or passing events and objects bear to general truth, and the moods of his own mind, the most intelligent man is sometimes in danger of overlooking that other relation, in which they are likewise to be placed, to the apprehension and

sympathies of his hearers. His discourse appears like soliloquy intermixed with dialogue. But the uneducated and unreflecting talker overlooks *all* mental relations, and consequently precludes all method that is not purely accidental. Hence,—the nearer the things and incidents in time and place, the more distant, disjointed, and impertinent to each other, and to any common purpose, will they appear in his narration; and this from the absence of any leading thought in the narrator's own mind. On the contrary, where the habit of method is present and effective, things the most remote and diverse in time, place, and outward circumstance, are brought into mental contiguity and succession, the more striking as the less expected. But while we would impress the necessity of this habit, the illustrations adduced give proof that in undue preponderance, and when the prerogative of the mind is stretched into despotism, the discourse may degenerate into the wayward or the fantastical.

Shakspeare needed not to read Horace in order to give his characters that methodical *unity* which the wise Roman so strongly recommends:—

> Si quid inexpertum scenæ committis, et audes
> Personam formare novam; servetur ad imum
> Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet.

But this was not the only way in which he followed an accurate philosophic method: we quote the expressions of Schlegel, a foreign critic of great and deserved reputation:—"If Shakspeare

deserves our admiration for his characters, he is equally deserving of it for his exhibition of *passion*, taking this word in its widest signification, as including every mental condition, every tone from indifference or familiar mirth, to the wildest rage and despair. He gives us the history of minds: *he lays open to us, in a single word, a whole series of preceding conditions.*" This last is a profound and exquisite remark; and it necessarily implies that Shakspeare contemplated *ideas*, in which alone are involved conditions and consequences *ad infinitum*. Purblind critics, whose mental vision could not reach far enough to comprise the whole dimensions of our poetical Hercules, have busied themselves in measuring and spanning him muscle by muscle, till they fancied they had discovered some disproportion. There are two answers applicable to most of such remarks. First, that Shakspeare understood the true language and external workings of passion better than his critics. He had a higher, and a more ideal, and consequently a more methodical sense of harmony than they. A very slight knowledge of music will enable any one to detect discords in the exquisite harmonies of Haydn or Mozart; and Bentley has found more false grammar in the *Paradise Lost* than ever poor boy was whipped for through all the forms of Eton or Westminster; but to know why the minor note is introduced into the major key, or the nominative case left to seek for its verb, requires an acquaintance with some preliminary steps of the methodical

scale, at the top of which sits the author, and at the bottom the critic. The second answer is, that Shakspeare was pursuing two methods at once; and besides the psychological * method, he had also to attend to the poetical. Now the poetical method requires above all things a preponderance of pleasurable feeling; and where the interest of the events and characters and passions is too strong to be continuous without becoming painful, there poetical method requires that there should be, what Schlegel calls "a musical alleviation of our sympathy." The Lydian mode must temper the Dorian. This we call method.

We said that Shakspeare pursued two methods. Oh! he pursued many, many more—"both oar and sail"—and the guidance of the helm, and the heaving of the lead, and the watchful observation of the stars, and the thunder of his grand artillery. What shall we say of his moral conceptions? Not made up of miserable clap-traps, and the tag-ends of mawkish novels, and endless sermonising;—but furnishing lessons of profound meditation to frail and fallible human nature. He shows us crime and want of principle clothed not with a spurious greatness of soul, but with a force of intellect which too often imposes but the more easily on the

* We beg pardon for the use of this *insolens verbum*; but it is one of which our language stands in great need. We have no single term to express the philosophy of the human mind; and what is worse, the principles of that philosophy are commonly called *metaphysical*, a word of very different meaning.

weak, misjudging multitude. He shows us the innocent mind of *Othello* plunged by its own unsuspecting and therefore unwatchful confidence, in guilt and misery not to be endured. Look at *Lear*, look at *Richard*, look, in short, at every moral picture of this mighty moralist! Whoso does not rise from their attentive perusal "a sadder and a wiser man"—let him never dream that he knows any thing of philosophical method.

Nay, even in his style, how methodical is our "sweet Shakspeare." Sweetness is indeed its predominant characteristic, and it has a few immethodical luxuriances of wit; and he may occasionally be convicted of words which convey a volume of thought, when the business of the scene did not absolutely require such deep meditation. But pardoning him these *dulcia vitia*, who ever fashioned the English language, or any language, ancient or modern, into such variety of appropriate apparel, from "the gorgeous pall of scepter'd tragedy" to the easy dress of flowing pastoral?

> More musical to lark than shepherd's ear,
> When wheat is green, and hawthorn buds appear.

Who, like him, could so methodically suit the very flow and tone of discourse to characters lying so wide apart in rank, and habits, and peculiarities, as *Holofernes* and *Queen Catharine*, *Falstaff* and *Lear*? When we compare the pure English style of Shakspeare with that of the very best writers of his day, we stand astonished at the

method by which he was directed in the choice of those words and idioms, which are as fresh now as in their first bloom; nay, which are at the present moment at once more energetic, more expressive, more natural, and more elegant, than those of the happiest and most admired living speakers or writers.

But Shakspeare was "not methodical in the structure of his fable." Oh gentle critic! be advised. Do not trust too much to your professional dexterity in the use of the scalping-knife and tomahawk. Weapons of diviner mould are wielded by your adversary; and you are meeting him here on his own peculiar ground, the ground of *idea*, of thought, and of inspiration. The very point of this dispute is ideal. The question is one of *unity;* and unity, as we have shown, is wholly the subject of ideal law. There are said to be three great unities which Shakspeare has violated; those of time, place, and action. Now the unities of time and place we will not dispute about. Be ours the poet,—

> ——————— qui pectus inaniter angit,
> Irritat, mulcet, falsis terroribus implet
> Ut magus, et *modo me Thebis, modo ponit Athenis.*

The dramatist who circumscribes himself within that unity of time which is regulated by a stop-watch, may be exact, but is not methodical; or his method is of the least and lowest class. But

> Where is he living clipt in with the sea,
> That chides the banks of England, Wales, or Scotland,

who can transpose the scenes of *Macbeth*, and make the seated heart knock at the ribs with the same force as now it does, when the mysterious tale is conducted from the open heath, on which the weird sisters are ushered in with thunder and lightning, to the fated fight of Dunsinane, in which their victim expiates with life his credulity and his ambition? To the disgrace of the English stage, such attempts have indeed been made on almost all the dramas of Shakspeare. Scarcely a season passes which does not produce some *usteron proteron* of this kind in which the mangled limbs of our great poet are thrown together "in most admired disorder."—There was once a noble author, who, by a refined species of murder, cut up the play of *Julius Cæsar* into two good set tragedies. M. Voltaire, we believe, had the grace to make but one of it; but whether his *Brutus* be an improvement on the model from which it was taken, we trust, after what we have already said, we shall hardly be expected to discuss.

Thus we have seen that Shakspeare's mind, rich in stores of acquired knowledge, commanded all these stores, and rendered them disposable, by means of his intimate acquaintance with the great laws of thought which form and regulate method. We have seen him exemplifying the opposite faults of method in two different characters; we have seen that he was himself methodical in the delineation of character, in the display of passion, in the conceptions of moral being, in the adapta-

tions of language, in the connexion and admirable intertexture of his ever-interesting fable. Let it not, after this, be said that poetry—and under the word poetry we will now take leave to include all the works of the higher imagination, whether operating by measured sound, or by the harmonies of form and colour, or by words, the more immediate and universal representatives of thought —is not strictly methodical; nay, does not owe its whole charm, and all its beauty, and all its power, to the philosophical principles of method.

ENCYCLOPÆDIA METROPOLITANA, *Part 1st.*[*]

[*] This number and the preceding one will be considered, I think, as containing unanswerable refutations of the once very prevalent idea, that Shakspeare's plays were the mere offspring of wild and irregular genius, uncontrolled by, and even ignorant of, the laws of method and composition. It must be confessed, indeed, that both Schlegel and the writer in the Encyclopædia have expressed themselves, in one or two instances, in language not sufficiently qualified; but that they have obtained the purpose which they had in view, that they have proved Shakspeare in his noblest pieces to have been not only philosophically profound, but, in the best sense, strictly methodical, can admit of little doubt.—I must here also remark that the present paper cannot fail of imparting a highly favourable impression of the *critical* department of the *Encyclopædia Metropolitana;* and it is but justice to add that the *scientific* is conducted with equal if not superior ability.

No. XII.

ON SHAKSPEARE'S DELINEATION OF CHARACTER.

SHAKSPEARE'S knowledge of mankind has become proverbial: in this his superiority is so great, that he has justly been called the master of the human heart. A readiness in remarking even the nicer involuntary demonstrations of the mind, and the expressing with certainty the meaning of these signs acquired from experience and reflection, constitutes the observer of men; acuteness in drawing still farther conclusions from them, and in arranging the separate observations according to grounds of probability in a connected manner, may be said to be knowing men. The distinguishing property of the dramatic poet who is great in characterization is something altogether different from this, which either, take it which way we will, includes in it this readiness and this acuteness, or dispenses with both. It is the capability of transporting himself so completely into every situation, even the most unusual, that he is enabled, as plenipotentiary of the whole human race, without particular instructions for each separate case, to act and speak in the name of every individual. It is the power of endowing the creatures of his imagination with such self-existent energy, that they

afterwards act in each conjuncture according to general laws of nature: the poet, in his dreams, institutes, as it were, experiments which are received with as much authority as if they had been made on real objects. The inconceivable in this, and what never can be learned, is, that the characters appear neither to do nor to say anything on account of the spectator; and yet that the poet, by means of the exhibition itself without any subsidiary explanation, communicates the gift of looking into the inmost recesses of their minds. Hence Goëthe has ingeniously compared Shakspeare's characters to watches with chrystalline plates and cases, which, while they point out the hours as correctly as other watches, enable us at the same time to perceive the inward springs whereby all this is accomplished.

Nothing, however, is more foreign to Shakspeare than a certain dissecting mode of composition, which laboriously enumerates to us all the motives by which a man is determined to act in this or that particular manner. This way of accounting for motives, the rage of many of the modern historians, might be carried at length to an extent which would abolish every thing like individuality, and resolve all character into nothing but the effect of foreign or external influences, while we know that it frequently announces itself in the most decided manner in the earliest infancy. After all, a man acts so because he is so. And how each man is constituted, Shakspeare reveals to us

in the most immediate manner: he demands and obtains our belief, even for what is singular and deviates from the ordinary course of nature. Never, perhaps, was there so comprehensive a talent for characterization as Shakspeare's. It not only grasps the diversities of rank, sex, and age, down to the dawnings of infancy; not only do the king and the beggar, the hero and the pickpocket, the sage and the idiot, speak and act with equal truth; not only does he transport himself to distant ages and foreign nations, and portray in the most accurate manner, with only a few apparent violations of costume, the spirit of the ancient Romans, of the French in their wars with the English, of the English themselves during a great part of their history, of the southern Europeans, (in the serious part of many comedies,) the cultivated society of that time, and the former rude and barbarous state of the North; his human characters have not only such depth and precision that they cannot be arranged under classes, and are inexhaustible even in conception: no, this Prometheus not merely forms men, he opens the gates of the magical world of spirits, calls up the midnight ghost, exhibits before us his witches amidst their unhallowed mysteries, peoples the air with sportive fairies and sylphs; and these beings, existing only in imagination, possess such truth and consistency, that even when deformed monsters, like Caliban, he extorts the assenting conviction, if there should be such beings they would so conduct themselves. In a

word, as he carries with him the most fruitful and daring fancy into the kingdom of nature, on the other hand, he carries nature into the regions of fancy, lying beyond the confines of reality. We are lost in astonishment at seeing the extraordinary, the wonderful, and the unheard of, in such intimate nearness.

Pope and Johnson appear to contradict each other in a singular manner, when the first says, all the characters of Shakspeare are individuals, and the second, they are species. And yet, perhaps, these opinions may admit of reconciliation. Pope's expression is unquestionably the more correct. A character which should merely be a personification of a naked general idea could neither exhibit any great depth nor any great variety. The names of genera and species are well known to be merely auxiliaries for the understanding, that we may embrace the infinite variety of nature in a certain order. The characters which Shakspeare has thoroughly delineated possess undoubtedly a number of individual peculiarities, but at the same time a signification which is not applicable to them alone: they generally supply materials for a profound theory of their distinguishing property. But even with the above correction, this opinion must still have its limitations. Characterization is merely one ingredient of the dramatic art, and not dramatic poetry itself. It would be improper in the extreme, if the poet were to draw our attention to

superfluous traits of character, when he ought to endeavour to produce other impressions. Whenever the musical or the fanciful preponderate, the characteristical is necessarily thrown into the back ground. Hence many of the figures of Shakspeare exhibit merely external designations, determined by the place which they occupy in the whole; they are like secondary persons in a public procession, to whose physiognomy we seldom pay much attention; their only importance is derived from the solemnity of their dress, and the object in which they are engaged. Shakspeare's messengers, for instance, are for the most part merely messengers, yet not common, but poetical messengers: the messages which they have to bring is the soul which suggests to them their language. Other voices too are merely raised as melodious lamentations or rejoicings, or reflections on what has taken place; and in a serious drama without chorus, this must always be more or less the case, if we would not have it prosaical.

If the delineation of all the characters of Shakspeare, separately considered, is inimitably firm and correct, he surpasses even himself in so combining and contrasting them, that they serve to bring out each other. This is the very summit of dramatic characterization; for we can never estimate a man altogether abstractedly by himself according to his true worth; we must see him in his relations with others; and it is here that most dramatic poets are deficient. Shakspeare makes

each of his principal characters the glass in which the others are reflected, and in which we are enabled to discover what could not be immediately revealed to us. What in others is most profound, lies in him at the surface. We should be very ill advised were we always to take the declarations of the characters respecting themselves and others for sterling gold. Ambiguity of intention, very properly in him, overflows with the most praiseworthy principles; and sage maxims are not unfrequently put in the mouth of imbecility, to show how easily such common-place truisms may be acquired. Nobody ever painted as he has done the facility of self-deception, the half self-conscious hypocrisy towards ourselves, with which even noble minds attempt to disguise the almost inevitable influence of selfish motives in human nature. This secret irony of the characterization is deserving of admiration as a storehouse of acuteness and sagacity; but it is the grave of enthusiasm. But this is the conclusion at which we arrive when we have had the misfortune to see human nature through and through; and besides the melancholy truth that no virtue and greatness are altogether pure and genuine, and the dangerous error that the highest perfection is attainable, we have no remaining choice. Here we may perceive, notwithstanding his power in exciting the most fervent emotions, a certain cool indifference in the poet himself, but still the indifference of a superior mind, which has run through

the circle of human existence, and survived feeling.

The irony in Shakspeare has not merely a reference to the separate characters, but frequently to the whole of the action. Most poets who portray human events in a narrative or dramatic form, take themselves apart, and exact from their readers a blind approbation or condemnation of whatever side they choose to support or oppose. The more zealous this rhetoric is, the more easily it fails of its effect. In every case we perceive that the subject does not come immediately before us, but that we view it through the medium of a different way of thinking. When, however, the poet, by a dexterous manœuvre, occasionally allows us a glance of the less brilliant reverse of the picture, he then places himself in a sort of secret understanding with the select circle of the intelligent among his readers or spectators; he shows them that he previously saw and admitted the validity of their objections; that he himself is not tied down by the subject represented, but soars freely above it; and that, if he chose, he could unrelentingly annihilate the beautiful and irresistibly attractive scenes which his magic pen has produced. Wherever the proper tragic enters, it is true, every thing like irony immediately ceases; but from the avowed raillery of comedy, to the point where the subjection of mortal beings to an inevitable destiny demands the highest degree of seriousness, there are a multitude of human

relations which unquestionably may be considered in an ironical view, without confounding the eternal line of separation between good and evil. This purpose is answered by the comic characters and scenes which are interwoven in the most of Shakspeare's pieces, where romantic fables or historical events are made the subject of a noble and elevating exhibition. A determinate parody of the serious part is frequently not to be mistaken in them; at other times the connexion is more loose and arbitrary; and the more wonderful the invention of the whole, the more easily it becomes merely a light delusion of the fancy. The comic interruptions everywhere serve to prevent the play from being converted into an employment, to preserve the mind in the possession of its hilarity, and to keep off that gloomy and inert seriousness which so easily steals into the sentimental, but not tragical, drama.[b] Most assuredly Shakspeare did not wish in this to comply with the taste of the multitude contrary to his own better judgment;

[b] Notwithstanding one or two instances of physical suffering introduced on the stage in the plays of Shakspeare, and which had better, perhaps, have been omitted, there is yet nothing in the impression which his genuine tragic dramas leave behind them, of gloom and horror, nothing of that wild, painful, and harassing sensation so frequently felt from the perusal of the tragedies of his contemporaries. The lights and shades, indeed, are so skilfully mingled in his pieces, and the moral so broad and pure, that we perpetually recur to them as transcripts of human life and passion, which never cease to instruct and please the mind, never fail to soothe and satisfy the heart,

for in various pieces, and in considerable parts of others, especially when the catastrophe approaches, and the minds are consequently more on the stretch, and no longer susceptible of any entertainment serving to divert their attention, he has abstained from all comic intermixtures. It was also an object with him that the clowns or buffoons should not occupy a more important place than that which he had assigned them: he expressly condemns the extemporising with which they loved to enlarge their parts.* • Johnson founds the justification of the species of drama in which seriousness and mirth are mixed, on this, that in real life the vulgar is found close to the sublime, that the merry and the sad usually accompany and succeed one another. But it does not follow that because both are found together, they must not therefore be separated in the compositions of art. The observation is in other respects just, and this circumstance invests the poet with a power to proceed in that manner, because every thing in the drama must be regulated by the conditions of theatrical probability; but the mixture of such

* In Hamlet's directions to the players.

• There is every reason to believe that much of what has been objected to as occurring in some passages in the parts of Shakspeare's clowns, has been foisted into these parts during their performance on the stage, by the presumptuous officiousness of the actors, and adopted into the text, as favourites with the lower orders, by the first editors, who were, as is well known, the very fellows and companions of those who had taken these unwarrantable liberties.

dissimilar, and apparently contradictory ingredients, in the same works, can only be justifiable on principles reconcileable with the views of art, which I have already described. In the dramas of Shakspeare the comic scenes are the anti-chamber of the poetry, where the servants remain: these prosaical associates must not give such an extension to their voice as to deafen the speakers in the hall itself; however, in those intervals when the ideal society has retired, they deserve to be listened to: the boldness of their raillery, the pretension of their imitations, may afford us many a conclusion respecting the relations of their masters.

Shakspeare's comic talent is equally wonderful with that which he has shown in the pathetic and tragic; it stands on an equal elevation, and possesses equal extent and profundity: all that I before wished was, not to admit that the former preponderated. He is highly inventive in comic situations and motives: it will be hardly possible to show whence he has taken any of them; whereas, in the serious part of his dramas, he has generally laid hold of something already known. His comic characterization is equally true, various, and profound, with his serious. So little is he disposed to caricature, that we may rather say many of his traits are almost too nice and delicate for the stage, that they can only be properly seized by a great actor, and fully understood by a very acute audience. Not only has he delinea-

ted many kinds of folly, he has also contrived to exhibit mere stupidity in a most diverting and entertaining manner. There is also a peculiar species of the farcical to be found in his pieces, which seems to us to be introduced in a more arbitrary manner, but which, however, is founded in imitation of an actual custom. This is the introduction of the buffoon; the fool with his cap and motley dress, called in English, *clown*, who appears in several comedies, though not in all, but in *Lear* alone of the tragedies, and who generally exercises his wit merely in conversation with the principal persons, though he is also sometimes incorporated with the action. In those times it was not only usual for princes to keep court fools; but in many distinguished families they retained, along with other servants, such an exhilarating house-mate as a good antidote against the insipidity and wearisomeness of ordinary life, as a welcome interruption of established formalities. Great men, and even churchmen, did not consider it beneath their dignity to recruit and solace themselves after important concerns with the conversation of their fools. The celebrated Sir Thomas More had his fool painted along with himself by Holbein. Shakspeare appears to have lived immediately before the time when the custom began to be abolished; in the English comic authors who succeeded him, the clown is no longer to be found. The dismissal of the fool has been extolled as a proof of refinement; and our honest fore-

fathers have been pitied for taking delight in such a coarse and farcical entertainment. I am much rather, however, disposed to believe that the practice was dropped from the difficulty in finding fools able to do full justice to their parts:* on the other hand, reason, with all its conceit of itself, has become too timid to tolerate such bold irony; it is always careful lest the mantle of its gravity should be disturbed in any of its folds; and rather than allow a privileged place to folly beside itself, it has unconsciously assumed the part of the ridiculous; but, alas! a heavy and cheerless ridicule.* It would be easy to make a collection of the excellent sallies and biting sarcasms which have been preserved of celebrated court fools. It is well known that they frequently told such truths to princes as are never now told to them.* Shak-

* See Hamlet's praise of Yorick. In The Twelfth Night, Viola says:

> This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
> And to do that well, craves a kind of wit;
> He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
> The quality of the persons, and the time;
> And like the haggard, check at every feather
> That comes before his eye. This is a practice
> As full of labour as a wise man's art:
> For folly that he wisely shows is fit,
> But wise men's folly fall'n quite taints their wit.

* "Since the little wit that fools have was silenced, the little foolery that wise men have makes a greater show."—As You Like It, Act 1. Sc. 2.

* Charles the Bold, of Burgundy, is known to have frequently boasted that he wished to rival Hannibal as the greatest general

speare's fools, along with somewhat of an over-straining for wit, which cannot altogether be avoided when wit becomes a separate profession, have, for the most part, an incomparable humour, and an infinite abundance of intellect, enough to supply a whole host of ordinary wise men.

AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL.[d]

of all ages. After his defeat at Granson, his fool accompanied him in his hurried flight, and exclaimed, "Ah, your Grace, they have for once Hanniballed us!" If the Duke had given an ear to this warning raillery, he would not so soon afterwards have come to a disgraceful end.

[d] Lectures on Dramatic Literature, vol. ii. p. 128—132. and 138—145. Black's Translation.

No. XIII.

ON SHAKSPEARE'S LOVE OF NATURAL BEAUTY.

SHAKSPEARE was familiar with all beautiful forms and images, with all that is sweet or majestic in the simple aspects of nature—with that indestructible love of flowers and odors, and dews and clear waters—and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies, and woodland solitudes, and moonlight bowers, which are the material elements of poetry—and with that fine sense of their undefinable relation to mental emotion, which is its essence and vivifying soul—and which, in the midst of his most busy and atrocious scenes, falls, like gleams of sunshine on rocks and ruins—contrasting with all that is rugged and repulsive, and reminding us of the existence of purer and brighter elements—which HE ALONE has poured out from the richness of his own mind without effort or restraint, and contrived to intermingle with the play of all the passions, and the vulgar course of this world's affairs, without deserting for an instant the proper business of the scene, or appearing to pause or digress from love of ornament or need of repose;—He alone, who, when the object requires it, is always keen, and worldly, and practical—and who yet, without changing his hand, or stopping his course, scatters around him,

as he goes, all sounds and shapes of sweetness,—and conjures up landscapes of immortal fragrance and freshness, and peoples them with spirits of glorious aspect and attractive grace—and is a thousand times more full of fancy, and imagery, and splendor, than those who, for the sake of such qualities, have shrunk back from the delineation of character or passion, and declined the discussion of human duties and cares. More full of wisdom, and ridicule, and sagacity, than all the moralists and satirists in existence, he is more wild, airy, and inventive, and more pathetic and fantastic than all the poets of all regions and ages of the world, and has all those elements so happily mixed up in him, and bears his high faculties so temperately, that the most severe reader cannot complain of him for want of strength or of reason, nor the most sensitive for defect of ornament or ingenuity. Every thing in him is in unmeasured abundance and unequalled perfection; but every thing so balanced and kept in subordination, as not to jostle or disturb, or take the place of another. The most exquisite poetical conceptions, images, and descriptions, are given with such brevity, and introduced with such skill, as merely to adorn, without loading the sense they accompany. Although his sails are purple and perfumed, and his prow of beaten gold, they waft him on his voyage, not less, but more rapidly and directly than if they had been composed of baser materials. All his excellences, like those of Nature herself, are thrown

out together; and, instead of interfering with, support and recommend each other. His flowers are not tied up in garlands, nor his fruits crushed into baskets—but spring living from the soil, in all the dew and freshness of youth; while the graceful foliage in which they lurk, and the ample branches, the rough and vigorous stem, and the wide-spreading roots on which they depend, are present along with them, and share, in their places, the equal care of their creator.

What other poet has put all the charm of a moonlight landscape into a single line?—and that by an image so true to nature, and so simple, as to seem obvious to the most common observation?—

> See how the Moonlight SLEEPS on yonder bank!

Who else has expressed, in three lines, all that is picturesque and lovely in a summer's dawn?—first setting before our eyes, with magical precision, the visible appearances of the infant light, and then, by one graceful and glorious image, pouring on our souls all the freshness, cheerfulness, and sublimity, of returning morning?—

> ——— See, love! what envious streaks
> Do lace the severing clouds in yonder East:
> Night's candles* are burnt out,—and jocund Day
> Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

* If the advocates for the grand style object to this expression, we shall not stop to defend it; but, to us, it seems equally beautiful, as it is obvious and natural, to a person coming out of a lighted chamber into the pale dawn. The

Where shall we find sweet sounds and odours so luxuriously blended and illustrated as in these few words of sweetness and melody, where the author says of soft music—

> O it came o'er my ear, like the sweet South
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour.

This is still finer, we think, than the noble speech on music in the Merchant of Venice, and only to be compared with the enchantments of Prospero's island; where all the effects of sweet sounds are expressed in miraculous numbers, and traced in their operation on all the gradations of being, from the delicate Ariel to the brutish Caliban, who, savage as he is, is still touched with those supernatural harmonies, and thus exhorts his less poetical associates—

> —— Be not afraid, the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
> Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices,
> That if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Would make me sleep again.—

word candle, we admit, is rather homely in modern language, while lamp is sufficiently dignified for poetry. The moon hangs her silver lamp on high, in every schoolboy's copy of verses; but she could not be called the candle of heaven without manifest absurdity. Such are the caprices of usage. Yet we like the passage before us much better as it is, than if the candles were changed into lamps. If we should read 'The lamps of heaven are quenched,' or 'wax dim,' it appears to us that the whole charm of the expression would be lost.

Observe, too, that this and the other poetical speeches of this incarnate demon are not mere ornaments of the poet's fancy, but explain his character, and describe his situation more briefly and effectually than any other words could have done. In this play, and in the Midsummer Night's Dream, all Eden is unlocked before us, and the whole treasury of natural and supernatural beauty poured out profusely, to the delight of all our faculties. We dare not trust ourselves with quotations; but we refer to those plays generally—to the forest scenes in 'As You Like it'—the rustic parts of the Winter's Tale—several entire scenes in Cymbeline and in Romeo and Juliet—and many passages in all the other plays—as illustrating this love of nature and natural beauty of which we have been speaking—the power it had over the poet, and the power it imparted to him. Who else would have thought, on the very threshold of treason and midnight murder, of bringing in so sweet and rural an image at the portal of that blood-stained castle?

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By his loved masonry that heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here. No jutting frieze,
> Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but this bird
> Has made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle.

Nor is this brought in for the sake of an elaborate contrast between the peaceful innocence of this exterior, and the guilt and horrors that are to be enacted within. There is no hint of any such

suggestion, but it is set down from the pure love of nature and reality—because the kindled mind of the poet brought the whole scene before his eyes, and he painted all that he saw in his vision. The same taste predominates in that emphatic exhortation to evil, where Lady Macbeth says,

> ——— Look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under it.

And in that proud boast of the bloody Richard—

> ——— But I was *born* so high:
> Our aery buildeth in the cedar's top,
> And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun.

The same splendour of natural imagery, brought simply and directly to bear upon stern and repulsive passions, is to be found in the cynic rebukes of Apemantus to Timon.

> ——— Will these moist trees
> That have outlived the eagle, page thy heels,
> And skip when thou point'st out? will the cold brook,
> Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste
> To cure thine o'er-night's surfeit?

No one but Shakspeare would have thought of putting this noble picture into the taunting address of a snappish misanthrope—any more than the following into the mouth of a mercenary murderer:

> Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,
> And in their summer beauty kissed each other.

Or this delicious description of concealed love into that of a regretful and moralizing parent.

But he, his own affection's counsellor,
Is to himself so secret and so close,
As is the bud bit with an envious worm,
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.

And yet all these are so far from being unnatural, that they are no sooner put where they are than we feel their beauty and effect, and acknowledge our obligations to that exuberant genius which alone could thus throw out graces and attractions where there seemed to be neither room nor call for them. In the same spirit of prodigality, he puts this rapturous and passionate exaltation of the beauty of Imogen into the mouth of one who is not even a lover:

——————— It is her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus! the flame o'th' taper
Bows towards her! and would under-peep her lids
To see th' enclosed lights, now canopied
Under the windows, white and azure, laced
With blue of Heaven's own tinct—on her left breast
A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
I' the bottom of a cowslip.

EDINBURGH REVIEW.*

* Vol. xxviii, pp. 473—477.

No. XIV.

ON SHAKSPEARE'S DELINEATION OF PASSION.

If Shakspeare deserves our admiration for his characters, he is equally deserving of it for his exhibition of passion, taking this word in its widest signification, as including every mental condition, every tone from indifference or familiar mirth to the wildest rage and despair. He gives us the history of minds; he lays open to us, in a single word, a whole series of preceding conditions. His passions do not at first stand displayed to us in all their height, as is the case with so many tragic poets, who, in the language of Lessing, are thorough masters of the legal style of love. He paints, in a most inimitable manner, the gradual progress from the first origin; "he gives," as Lessing says, "a living picture of all the most minute and secret artifices by which a feeling steals into our souls, of all the imperceptible advantages which it there gains, of all the stratagems by which every other passion is made subservient to it, till it becomes the sole tyrant of our desires and our aversions." Of all poets, perhaps, he alone has pourtrayed the mental diseases, melancholy, delirium, lunacy, with such inexpressible and, in every respect, definite truth, that the

physician may enrich his observations from them in the same manner as from real cases.[f]

And yet Johnson has objected to Shakspeare that his pathos is not always natural and free from affectation. There are, it is true, passages, though comparatively speaking very few, where his poetry exceeds the bounds of true dialogue, where a too soaring imagination, a too luxuriant wit, rendered the complete dramatic forgetfulness of himself impossible. With this exception, the censure originates only in a fanciless way of thinking, to which every thing appears unnatural that does not suit its tame insipidity. Hence an idea has been formed of simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery and nowise elevated above every-day life. But energetical passions electrify the whole of the mental powers, and will consequently, in highly favoured natures, express themselves in an ingenious and figurative manner. It has been often remarked

[f] Never was lunacy, as the effect of severe grief and disappointment, painted in stronger or more correct colours than in the person of *Lear;* and where shall we find the first stage of *melancholia* expressed in terms more admirably true to nature than in the following description from the lips of *Hamlet?* "I have of late," he says, "but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercise; and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me but a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours."

that indignation gives wit; and as despair occasionally breaks out into laughter, it may sometimes also give vent to itself in antithetical comparisons.

Besides, the rights of the poetical form have not been duly weighed. Shakspeare, who was always sure of his object, to move in a sufficiently powerful manner when he wished to do so, has occasionally, by indulging in a freer play, purposely moderated the impressions when too painful, and immediately introduced a musical alleviation of our sympathy.* He had not those rude ideas of his art which many moderns seem to have, as if the poet, like the clown in the proverb, must strike twice on the same place. An ancient rhetorician delivered a caution against dwelling too long on the excitation of pity; for nothing, he said, dries so soon as tears; and Shakspeare acted conformably to this ingenious maxim without knowing it. The paradoxical assertion of Johnson, that Shakspeare had a greater talent for comedy than tragedy, and that in the latter he has frequently displayed an affected tone, does not even deserve to be so far noticed that we should adduce, by way of refutation, the great tragical compositions of the poet, which, for overpowering effect, leave almost every thing which the stage has yet seen

* A contemporary of the poet tenderly felt this while he says:—

> Yet so to temper passion, that our ears
> Take pleasure in their pain, and eyes in tears
> Both smile and weep.

far behind them: a few of the much less celebrated scenes would be quite sufficient. What might to many readers lend an appearance of truth to this opinion, are the plays on words, which, not unfrequently in Shakspeare, are introduced into serious and sublime passages, and into those also of a peculiarly pathetic nature. I shall here, therefore, deliver a few observations respecting a play on words in general, and its poetical use. A thorough investigation would lead us too far from our subject, and too deeply into considerations on the essence of language, and its relation to poetry, or rhyme, &c. There is, in the human mind, a desire that language should exhibit the object which it denotes in a sensible manner by sound, which may be traced even as far back as the origin of poetry. As, in the shape in which language comes down to us, this is seldom the case in a perceptible degree, an imagination which has been powerfully excited is fond of laying hold of the congruity in sound which may accidentally offer itself, that by such means he may, in a single case, restore the lost resemblance between the word and the thing. For example, it was common to seek in the name of a person, though often accidentally bestowed, a reference to his qualities and fortune,—it was purposely converted into an expressive name. Those who cry out against plays on words as an unnatural and affected invention, only betray their own ignorance. With children, as well as nations

of the most simple manners, a great inclination to them is often displayed, as correct ideas respecting the derivation and affinity of words have not been developed among them, and do not consequently stand in the way of this caprice. In *Homer* we find several examples; the *Books of Moses*, the oldest written memorial of the primitive world, are, as is well known, full of them. On the other hand, poets of a very cultivated taste, or orators like Cicero, have delighted in them. Whoever, in *Richard the Second*, is disgusted with the affecting play of words of the dying John of Gaunt on his own name, let him remember that the same thing occurs in the Ajax of Sophocles. We do not mean to say that all plays on words are on all occasions to be justified. This must depend on the disposition of mind, whether it will admit of such a play of fancy, and whether the sallies, comparisons, and allusions, which lie at the bottom of them, possess internal solidity. Yet we must not proceed upon the principle of trying how the thought appears after it is deprived of the resemblance in sound, any more than we are to endeavour to feel the charm of rhymed versification after being deprived of rhyme. The laws of good taste on this subject must also vary with the quality of the languages. In those which possess a great number of homonymes, that is, words possessing the same, or nearly the same sound, though quite different in their derivation and signification, it is almost more

difficult to avoid than to fall on plays of words. It has also been dreaded lest a door might be opened to puerile witticism, if they were not proscribed in the most severe manner. I cannot find, however, that Shakspeare had such an invincible and immoderate passion for plays on words. It is true he often makes a most lavish use of this figure; in other pieces he has introduced it very sparingly; and in some of them, for example in *Macbeth*, I do not believe that the least vestige of it is to be found. Hence, in respect to the use or the rejection of plays on words, he must have been guided by the measure of the objects, and the different style in which they required to be treated, and have followed probably, as in every thing else, principles which would bear a strict examination.

The objection that Shakspeare wounds our feelings by the open display of the most disgusting moral odiousness, harrows up the mind unmercifully, and tortures even our eyes by the exhibition of the most insupportable and hateful spectacles, is one of much greater importance. He has never, in fact, varnished over wild and blood-thirsty passions with a pleasing exterior, never clothed crime and want of principle with a false show of greatness of soul, and in that respect he is every way deserving of praise. Twice he has portrayed downright villains, and the masterly way in which he has contrived to elude impressions of too painful a nature

may be seen in *Iago* and *Richard the Third.*[s] I allow that the reading, and still more the sight, of some of his pieces are not advisable to weak nerves, any more than the *Eumenides* of Æschylus; but is the poet, who can only reach an important object by bold and hazardous means, to allow himself to be influenced by considerations for persons of this description? If the effeminacy of the present day is to serve as a general standard of what tragical composition may exhibit to human nature, we shall be forced to set very narrow limits to art, and every thing like a powerful effect must at once be renounced. If we wish to have a grand purpose, we must also wish to have the means, and our nerves should in some measure accommodate themselves to painful impressions when, by way of requital, our mind is thereby elevated and strengthened.—The constant reference to a petty and puny race must cripple the boldness of the poet. Fortunately for his art, Shakspeare lived in an age extremely susceptible of noble and tender impressions, but which had still enough of the firmness inherited from a vigorous olden time, not to shrink back with dismay from every strong and violent picture. We have lived to see tragedies of which the catastrophe consists in the swoon of an enamoured princess: if Shakspeare falls occasionally into the opposite extreme, it is a noble error origi-

[s] See Note b, p. 165.

nating in the fulness of a gigantic strength. And this tragical Titan, who storms the heavens, and threatens to tear the world from off its hinges, who, more fruitful than Æschylus, makes our hair to stand on end, and congeals our blood with horror, possessed at the same time the insinuating loveliness of the sweetest poetry; he plays with love like a child, and his songs are breathed out like melting sighs. He unites in his existence the utmost elevation and the utmost depth; and the most foreign, and even apparently irreconcileable properties subsist in him peaceably together. The world of spirits and nature have laid all their treasures at his feet: in strength a demigod, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom a protecting spirit of a higher order, he lowers himself to mortals as if unconscious of his superiority, and is as open and unassuming as a child.

AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL.[b]

[b] Lectures on Dramatic Literature, Black's Translation, vol. 2, p. 132, et seq. Exalted as this eulogium is, I know not that it surpasses what must have been frequently felt and acknowledged by every poetical mind in reading Shakspeare.

No. XV.

ON THE INDIVIDUALITY OF SHAKSPEARE'S CHARACTERS.

Dr. Johnson praises Shakspeare's characters upon the ground of their being species, not individuals. Johnson could not, from some strange peculiarity in the constitution of his great mind, perceive the individual traits induced upon the general nature presented by the poet. All the persons, for instance, of the play of Henry the Eighth are, in a remarkable degree, individuals: this constitutes its greatest charm; though, most likely, it was the thing that occasioned the contemptuous criticism thereon pronounced by our great critic. 'The meek sorrows,' says he, 'and virtuous distress of Katherine have furnished some scenes, which may be justly numbered among the greatest efforts of tragedy. But the genius of Shakspeare comes in and goes out with Katherine. Every other part may be easily conceived and easily written.' We cannot subscribe to this verdict. In our opinion, the genius of Shakspeare is equally exhibited in Cardinal Wolsey.—

Cardinal Wolsey was a 'bold bad man;' his ambition, 'that scarlet sin,' prompted him to remove all obstructions in the way of his preferment,

and he is suspected of practising against the Duke of Buckingham:—

> ——————He was a man
> Of an unbounded stomach, ever ranking
> Himself with princes;

but not without reason, for if he had faults, he had also many virtues:—

> ——————From his cradle
> He was a scholar, and a ripe and good one;
> Exceeding wise, fair spoken, and persuading:
> Lofty and sour to them that loved him not;
> But to those men that sought him, sweet as summer.
> And though he were unsatisfied in getting,
> (Which was a sin,) yet in bestowing
> He was most princely.

Such a man is not without a claim upon our sympathies—he is within the sphere of our common humanity. The last acts of his life redeem the preceding. We have often admired the patience which he displays when Norfolk, Suffolk, and Surrey produce to him—

> ————the grand sum of his sins,
> The articles collected from his life;—

while, in their malice, they exultingly specify the charges against him in the king's possession, he stands in silent endurance, until they leave him with the taunting valediction—

> So fare you well, my *little good* Lord Cardinal;

—then follows his fine soliloquy, beginning with—

> So farewell to the *little good* you bear me;
> Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness:
> This is the state of man, &c.—

and the touching dialogue with Cromwell, wherein he tells him that he has recommended him to the king, and warns him against ambition:—

> By that sin fell the angels; how can man then,
> The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?

and concludes with—

> ——— Oh! Cromwell! Cromwell!
> Had I but served my God with half the zeal
> I served my king, he would not in mine age
> Have left me naked to mine enemies.

The circumstances of his death are equally affecting:—

> After the stout Earl of Northumberland
> Arrested him at York, and brought him forward
> (As a man sorely tainted) to his answer,
> He fell sick suddenly, and grew so ill
> He could not sit his mule.
> At last, with easy roads, he came to Leicester,
> Lodged in the abbey, where the reverend abbot,
> With all his convent, honourably received him,
> To whom he gave these words, 'O father abbot,
> An old man, broken with the storms of state,
> Is come to lay his weary bones amongst ye;
> Give him a little earth for charity!'
> So went to bed, where eagerly his sickness
> Pursued him still; and three nights after this,
> About the hour of eight, (which he himself
> Foretold should be his last,) full of repentance,
> Continual meditations, tears, and sorrows,

He gave his honours to the world again,
His blessed part to heaven, and slept in peace.

Thus it is always with Shakspeare. His worst characters have some claim upon our kindly feelings. Genius is the power of reflecting nature; for genius, as the word imports, is nature. The mind of Shakspeare was as a magic mirror, in which all human nature's possible forms and combinations were present, intuitively and inherently —not conceived—but as connatural portions of his own humanity. Whatever his characters were besides, they were also men. Such they were in the world of his imagination—such they are also in the world of reality. It is this harmony and correspondence between the world without and the world within, that gives the charm to his productions. His characters are not the mere abstractions of intellect from an understood class or species, but are generated in his own mind, as individuals having personal being there, and are distinctly brought out, not so much as representatives of character in actual nature, as the original productions of a plastic genius, which is also nature, and works like her. This is to be a poet; this is what is meant by a creative imagination.

QUARTERLY REVIEW.[1]

[1] No. 70.

No. XVI.

ON SHAKSPEARE, IN REFERENCE TO THE AGE IN WHICH HE FLOURISHED.

SHAKSPEARE flourished and wrote in the last half of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the first half of that of James the First; and consequently under monarchs who were learned themselves, and held literature in honour. The policy of modern Europe, by which the relations of its different states have been so variously interwoven, commenced a century before. Such was the zeal for the study of the ancients, that even court ladies, and the queen herself, were intimately acquainted with Latin and Greek, and could speak the former with fluency; a degree of knowledge which we should in vain seek for in the European courts of the present day. The trade and navigation of the English, which they carried on with all the four quarters of the world, made them acquainted with the customs and mental productions of other nations; and it would appear that they were then more indulgent to foreign manners than they are in the present day. Italy had already produced nearly all for which her literature is distinguished; and translations were diligently, and even successfully, executed in verse from the Italians. They

were not unacquainted with the Spanish literature, for it is certain that *Don Quixote* was read in England soon after its first appearance. Bacon, the founder of modern experimental philosophy, and of whom it may be said that he carried in his pocket all that merits the name of philosophy in the eighteenth century, was a contemporary of Shakspeare. His fame, as a writer, did not indeed burst forth till after his death; but what a number of ideas must have been in circulation before such an author could arise! Many branches of human knowledge have, since that time, been cultivated to a greater extent, but merely those branches which are totally unproductive to poetry: chemistry, mechanics, manufactures, and rural and political economy, will never enable a man to become a poet. I have elsewhere* examined into the pretensions of modern cultivation, as it is called, which looks down with such contempt on all preceding ages; I have shown that it is all little, superficial, and unsubstantial at bottom. The pride of what has been called the present maturity of human reason has come to a miserable end; and the structures erected by those pedagogues of the human race have fallen to pieces like the baby-houses of children.

The tone of society at present compels us to remark that there is a wide difference between cultivation and what is called polish. That artificial polish which puts an end to every thing like

* In my Lectures on the *Spirit of the Age*.

original communication, and subjects all intercourse to the insipid uniformity of certain rules, was undoubtedly unknown in the age of Shakspeare, as it is still in a great measure in England in the present day. They possessed the consciousness of healthful energy, which always expressed itself boldly, though often petulantly. The spirit of chivalry was not yet extinguished; and a queen who required the observance of much more regard for her sex than for her dignity, and who, from her determination, wisdom, and magnanimity, was, in fact, well qualified to infuse an ardent enthusiasm into the minds of her subjects, inflamed that spirit to the most noble love of glory and renown. Remains of the feudal independence were also still in existence; the nobility vied with each other in splendour of dress, and number of retinue; and every great lord had a sort of small court of his own. The distinction of ranks was yet strongly marked; and this is what is most to be wished for by the dramatic poet. In discourse they were delighted with quick and unexpected answers; and the witty sally passed rapidly like a ball from mouth to mouth, till it could no longer be kept up. This, and the excessive extent to which a play on words was carried, (for which King James himself had a great fondness, so that we need not wonder at the universality of the mode,) may be considered in the light of bad taste; but to take it for a symptom of rudeness and barbarity, is not less absurd than to infer the poverty of a people from their luxurious extravagance. These strained repartees

frequently occur in Shakspeare, with the view of painting the actual tone of the society of his day; it does not follow, however, that they met with his approbation, but, on the contrary, it appears that he held them in derision. Hamlet says, in the scene with the grave-digger, "By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it; the age is grown so picked, that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe." And Lorenzo, in the *Merchant of Venice*, alluding to Launcelot:

> O dear discretion, how his words are suited!
> The fool hath planted in his memory
> An army of good words: and I do know
> A many fools, that stand in better place,
> Garnish'd like him, that for a tricksy word
> Defy the matter.

Besides, Shakspeare, in a thousand places, lays an uncommonly great stress on the correct and refined tone of good company, and warns against every deviation from it, either through boorishness or affected foppery; he not only gives the most admirable lectures on the subject, but he represents it in all its gradations in every rank, age, and sex.—It is true that Shakspeare sometimes introduces us to improper company; at other times he suffers ambiguous expressions to be used in the presence of women, and even by women themselves. This species of petulance was probably not then unusual. He certainly did not do so to please the multitude, for in many of his pieces there

is not the slightest trace of any thing of this sort to be found; and what virgin tenderness does he not preserve throughout many of his female characters! When we see the liberties taken by other dramatic poets in England in his time, and even much later, we must account him comparatively chaste and moral. Neither must we overlook certain circumstances in the then state of the theatre. The female parts were not acted by women, but by boys; and no person of the fair sex appeared in the theatre without a mask. Under such a carnival disguise, much might be heard by them, and much might be ventured to be said in their presence, which, in other circumstances, would have been quite unsuitable. It is certainly to be wished that decency should be observed on all public occasions, and consequently also on the stage; but even in this it is possible to go too far. That censorious spirit, which scents out impurity in every sally of a bold and vivacious description, is at best but an ambiguous criterion of purity of morals; and there is frequently concealed under this hypocrisy the consciousness of an impure imagination. The determination to tolerate nothing which has the least reference to the sensual relation between the two sexes, may be carried to a pitch extremely oppressive to a dramatic poet, and injurious to the boldness and freedom of his composition. If considerations of such a nature were to be attended to, many of the happiest parts of the plays of Shakspeare, for example,

in *Measure for Measure*, and *All's Well that Ends Well*, which are handled with a due regard to decency, must be set aside for their impropriety.

Had no other monument of the age of Elizabeth come down to us than the works of Shakspeare, I should, from them alone, have formed the most advantageous idea of its state of social cultivation. Those who look through such strange spectacles as to find nothing in them but rudeness and barbarity, when they cannot deny what I have just now advanced, have no other resource for themselves but to say, "What has Shakspeare to do with the cultivation of his age? He had no share in it. Born in a low situation, ignorant and uneducated, he passed his life in low society, and laboured for bread to please a vulgar audience, without ever dreaming of fame or posterity."

In all this there is not a single word of truth, though it has been repeated a thousand times. We know, it is true, very little of the life of the poet; and what we do know, for the most part, consists of raked up anecdotes of a very suspicious nature, nearly of such a description as those which are told at inns to inquisitive strangers, who wish to know something of a celebrated man in the place where he lives. The first actual document which enabled us to have a peep into his family concerns was the discovery of his will. It betrayed an extraordinary deficiency of critical acumen in the commentators of Shakspeare, that none of them, as far as we know, have ever thought of availing them-

selves of his sonnets for tracing the circumstances of his life. These sonnets paint most unequivocally the actual situation and sentiments of the poet; they enable us to become acquainted with the passions of the man; they even contain the most remarkable confessions of his youthful errors.[j] Shakspeare's father was a man of property;[k] and in a diploma from the Herald's Office, for the renewal or confirmation of his coat of arms, he is styled *Gentleman*. Our poet, the oldest of four[l] children, could not, it is true, receive an academical education, as he married when hardly eighteen, probably in consequence of family arrangements. In this private way of life he continued but a very few years; and he was either enticed to London from the wearisomeness of his situation, or banished from home, as it is said, in consequence of his

j I beg leave, in this place, to refer to a former note on these sonnets, and to add that the reader who wishes for an ampler consideration of their merits, and of their applicability towards explaining some material circumstances of the life of Shakspeare, may consult my "Shakspeare and his Times," vol. ii. p. 50. ad p. 82.

k Up to the period of 1574, Shakspeare's father might be considered as a man of property, being possessed of two houses and some land, beside personal property; but he shortly afterwards fell into a state of poverty, and describes himself in 1597, four years before his death, as of "very small wealth and very few friends."

l This is a mistake, for John Shakspeare had *eight* children: Jone, Margaret, William, Gilbert, Jone, Ann, Richard, and Edmund. Of these, Jone, the first-born, died very early after birth, and Margaret when five months old.

irregularities. He there resorted to the situation of player, which he considered at first as a degradation, principally because he was seduced by the example of his comrades to participate in their wild and irregular manner of life.* It is extremely probable that, by the poetical fame which he acquired in the progress of his career, he was the principal means of ennobling the stage, and bringing the situation of a player into better repute. Even at a very early age he endeavoured to distinguish himself as a poet in other walks than those of the stage, as is proved by his juvenile poems of *Adonis* and *Lucrece*. He afterwards obtained the situation of joint proprietor and manager of the theatre for which he laboured. That he was not admitted to the society of persons of distinction is altogether incredible; besides many others, he found in the Earl of Southampton, the friend of the unfortunate Essex, a most liberal and kind patron. His pieces were not merely the delight of the million, but in great favor at court: the two monarchs under whose reigns he wrote, were, according to the testimony of a contemporary, alto-

* In one of his sonnets he says:—

O, for my sake do you with fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmless deeds,
That did not better for my life provide,
Than public means which public manners breeds.

And in the following:—

Your love and pity doth the impression fill,
Which *vulgar scandal* stamp'd upon my brow.

gether taken with him.* They were acted at court; and Elizabeth appears herself to have given occasion to the writing of more than one of them, for the celebration of her court festivals. It is known that King James honoured Shakspeare so far as to write to him with his own hand. All this looks very unlike either contempt or banishment into the obscurity of a low circle. Shakspeare acquired, by his activity as a poet, player, and stage-manager, a considerable property, which he enjoyed in his native spot, in retirement and in the society of a beloved daughter, in the last years of his too short life. Immediately after his death, a monument was erected over his grave, which may be considered sumptuous for those times.

Amidst such brilliant success, and with such distinguished proofs of respect and honour from his contemporaries, it would be singular indeed if Shakspeare, notwithstanding the modesty of a great mind, which he certainly possessed in a peculiar degree, should never have dreamed of posthumous fame. As a profound thinker, he had pretty accurately taken the measure of the circle of human capabilities, and he could say to himself with confidence, that many of his productions would not easily be surpassed. What foundation then is there for the contrary assertion, which would degrade the immortal artist to the situation of a daily

* Ben Jonson:—

And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,
That so did take Eliza and our James!

labourer for a rude multitude? Merely this, that he himself published no edition of his whole works. We do not reflect that a poet, always accustomed to labour immediately for the stage, who has often enjoyed the triumph of overpowering assembled crowds of spectators, and drawing from them the most tumultuous applause, who is not dependent on the caprice of vitiated stage directors, but left to his own discretion in the selection of a proper mode of theatrical composition, cares naturally much less for the closet of the solitary reader. In the first formation of a national stage, more especially, we find frequent examples of such negligence. Of the almost innumerable pieces of Lopez de Vega, many undoubtedly never were printed, and are thereby lost; and Cervantes did not print his earlier dramas, though he certainly boasts of them as meritorious works. As Shakspeare, on his retiring from the theatre, left his manuscripts behind with his fellow-managers, he might rely on theatrical tradition for handing them down to posterity, which would indeed have been sufficient for that purpose, if the closing of the theatres, under the oppression of the puritans, had not interrupted the natural order of things. We know, besides, that the poets used then to sell the exclusive possession of their pieces to a theatre: it is therefore not improbable that the right of property in his unprinted pieces was no longer vested in Shakspeare, or had not at least yet reverted to him. His fellow-managers entered on the publi-

cation seven years after his death (which probably surprised him in the intention) as it would appear on their own account, and for their own advantage.

AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL.[m]

[m] Lectures on Dramatic Literature apud Black, vol. ii. p. 107—117. The following attempt to assign the reasons which might prevent the immediate superintendence of Shakspeare over his own works, I have put into the mouth of the poet in my "Tale of the Days of Shakspeare," and I am happy to find that it has been considered as making a probable approximation to the truth.—"Why do you not, my friend," says Montchensey to the bard, "retired as you now are from the bustle and competition of a London life, give us a collected, and what I will not hesitate to say is much wanted, a corrected edition of your dramas? Not only are the quarto copies we possess printed in such a manner as to convince me they have had not a particle of your superintendence; but a number of plays, of which, I am persuaded, you have scarcely written a line, have been brought on the stage as yours, and even published with your name?"

"It is very true," replied the bard, with a somewhat jocular air, "and I must be content, I am afraid, like many a greater man, to father what does not strictly belong to me. But, indeed, my good friend, whilst I heartily thank you for your kind anxiety about the fate of my productions, I must at the same time confess that I have never yet dreamt of doing what you have suggested. The fact is, the pieces you allude to have more than answered my expectations; for they have not only procured me a bare subsistence, one of the chief objects for which they were *at first* written, but they have likewise obtained me the applause and good-will of my contemporaries, the patronage and friendship of several great and good men, and a competency for life. What may be their lot when I am dead and gone, and no longer here to give them countenance, I have scarcely yet ventured to enquire; for though I will not

be weak enough to pretend an ignorance of their occasional merits, I am too conscious of their numerous errors and defects to suppose that posterity will trouble their heads much about them."

"Indeed, indeed, my noble host," rejoined Montchensey, kindling into unusual animation as he spoke, "you much too lightly estimate the value of your own works. Without arrogating to myself any deep insight into futurity, I think I may venture to predict that a day will arrive when this inattention of yours will be a theme of universal regret."

"Say you so, my kind critic?" returned his somewhat astonished auditor, his mind momentarily sinking into reverie, whilst his eye flashed at the same instant with an intelligence that seemed penetrating the secrets of time; "Say you so?" he repeated; then starting, as it were, from the vision before him, he added in a more subdued tone, and with a look in which the most benevolent sweetness was yet mingled with a portion of subsiding enthusiasm, "if life and health be vouchsafed me, I will endeavour not to forget your suggestion. It is, indeed, but too true that much has been given to me, both on the stage and from the press, which I have never written, and much too has been sacrificed on my part, the necessary penalty of my profession, to please the popular ear; and for all which, I must likewise allow, the bare process of omission would be a ready cure. But the attempt to meet the evil as it should be met, is not just now in my power, for a great part of what I have produced is still the property of the theatre; and though my late fellows, Heminge and Condell, would, I have no doubt, do what they could to further my wishes, yet neither does the matter rest entirely on their shoulders, nor would their copartners, and the stationers connected with them, relinquish, at the present period, their share of the expected profits without a compensation too extravagant for me to think of. Yet a time may come when I shall more easily regain the control over my own offspring which I have now lost; and if it should not, you will recollect that I am no critic like my friend Ben Jonson; that, with the exception of his plays, mine partake but

a common fate with those of my contemporaries; and that, moreover, it is very probable the revision you wish for, should it pass, as in all likelihood it would, beyond the mere measure of blotting out, might in many instances injure the effect of what had been happily produced in the careless feryor of the moment. Besides, I must freely confess to you that retirement from the stage and all its concerns has long been a favourite object with me. My life has been one of bustle and fatigue, and, occasionally, of gaiety and dissipation; as an actor, I never felt myself sufficiently important to be fond of the occupation, and though the hours spent in composition were attended with pleasures great and peculiar to themselves, and have been abundantly rewarded by the public, I may, I think, without any charge of ingratitude, be permitted to remark that even in this way I have done enough."—Noontide Leisure, vol. i. p. 47, et seq.

No. XVII.

THE LIFE AND GENIUS OF SHAKSPEARE.

THE glory of Shakspeare at first appeared in France to be a subject of paradox and scandal; it now threatens the ancient renown of our theatre. This revolution, which has been already remarked, undoubtedly supposes great changes in opinions and manners; not only has it given birth to a question of literature and taste, but it has awakened many others which belong to the history of society. We shall not here attempt to enter into them: the study of the works of a man of genius is a subject of itself sufficiently fruitful.

Voltaire alternately called Shakspeare a great poet and a miserable buffoon, a Homer and a *Gilles*. In his youth, returning from England, the enthusiasm which he brought back with him for some of the scenes of Shakspeare, was considered as one of the daring novelties which he introduced into France. Forty years afterwards the same man levelled a thousand marks of sarcasm against the barbarity of Shakspeare, and he chose the Academy in particular as a sort of sanctuary for the fulmination of his anathemas. I know not if the Academy would, in the present day, tolerate

such usage; for the revolutions of taste penetrate into the literary world as well as into the world at large.

Voltaire deceived himself in wishing to debase the astonishing genius of Shakspeare; and all the burlesque citations which he accumulates for this purpose, prove nothing against the enthusiasm of which he himself had once partaken. I do not speak of La Harpe, who was led away by an intemperate displeasure not only against the defects but the reputation of Shakspeare, as if his own theatre had been in the least degree menaced by the gigantic fame of this poet. It is in the life, the age, and the genius of Shakspeare, that the critic must seek, without system and without caprice, for the source of his singular faults and powerful originality.

William Shakspeare was born on the 23rd of April, 1564, at Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick. We know very little respecting the childhood and the life of this celebrated man; and, notwithstanding the minute researches of biographical erudition, excited by the interest of so great a name, and by national self-love, the English are acquainted with little more in relation to him than his works. One is not able, even amongst them, to determine very clearly whether he were a Catholic or a Protestant, and they still discuss the question whether he were not lame, like the most famous English poet of our own age.

It appears that Shakspeare was the eldest son of a family of ten children.[n] His father, who was in the woollen trade,[o] had successively filled, in Stratford, the offices of grand bailiff and alderman,[p] until the time in which loss of fortune, and perhaps the reproach of catholicism, deprived him of all public employment. According to some traditions, he joined to the woollen trade that of a butcher; and the young Shakspeare, hastily recalled from the public school, where his parents could no longer afford to keep him, was early employed, it is said, in the most laborious duties of this profession. If we may believe an almost contemporary author, when Shakspeare was commanded to kill a calf, he performed this office with a sort of pomp, and failed not to pronounce a discourse before the assembled neighbours. Literary curiosity may, if so inclined, trace some affinity between these harangues of the young apprentice, and the subsequent tragic vocation of

[n] This error is the very reverse of one on the same subject noticed before, and has arisen amongst the biographers of Shakspeare from confounding the children of John Shakspeare, a shoemaker at Stratford from 1585 to 1592, with those of the father of the poet.

[o] It appears, from a manuscript of the proceedings of the bailiff's court in 1555, that John Shakspeare, the father of the poet, was originally a *glover*.

[p] He was admitted of the corporation in 1557, became one of the chamberlains in 1561, an alderman in 1565, and high-bailiff of the borough in 1568.

the poet; but it must be confessed that such first-fruits stand wide apart from the brilliant inspirations and the poetical origin of the Greek theatre. It was in the fields of Marathon, and at the festivals of victorious Athens, that Æschylus first heard the voice of the Muses.

Whatever might be these early and obscure occupations of Shakspeare, he was married in his eighteenth year to a woman older than himself, who rendered him, in a short time, the father of three children, but of whom, otherwise, there is scarcely a record in his history. This union probably left open to him all the avenues to an adventurous life. It was two years after this marriage that, chasing one night, in company with some poachers, the deer of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, Sir Thomas Lucy, he was seized by the keepers, and, avenging himself of this first disgrace by a satirical ballad, he fled to London to avoid the pursuit of the doubly offended knight. This anecdote is the best authenticated fact in the life of Shakspeare, for he has himself introduced it on the stage; and that ridiculous personage Judge Shallow, accusing Falstaff of a crime against the laws of the chase, is a remembrance of, and a retaliation for, this petty persecution.

On his arrival in London, Shakspeare, it is said, was reduced to the necessity of holding, at the door of a theatre, the horses of those who fre-

quented it,[1] or else filled at first some inferior office in this theatre; of the truth of these anecdotes, however, notwithstanding the researches of the commentators, we must still remain ignorant. What appears less doubtful is, that in 1592, six or seven years after his arrival in London, he was already known, and even envied, as an actor, and as a dramatic author. A libel of the times contains allusions with regard to him sufficiently evident, and of which the bitterness betrays a well-founded jealousy. It appears, however, that Shakspeare did not give himself up at first, or, at least, not entirely, to dramatic composition. In publishing, under the date of 1593, a poem entitled *Venus and Adonis*, dedicated to Lord Southampton, Shakspeare called this work the *first-born* of his imagination. This little poem seems to be written altogether in the Italian taste, if we may judge from the studied nature of the style, from the affectation of wit, and the profusion of imagery. The same style is to be found in a collection of sonnets which he printed in 1596, under the title of *The Passionate Pilgrim*. We find it also in the poem of *Lucrece*, another production of Shakspeare's which bears the same date.

These various essays may be regarded as the first studies of this great poet, which cannot, without a strange misconception, be supposed destitute

[1] There is much reason to believe this is an idle tale; for Rowe, who was acquainted with the story, has declined making use of it in his life of the bard.

of all culture, and written at random. Undoubtedly Shakspeare, although living in a very learned age, was entirely ignorant of the ancient languages;[r] but, perhaps, he knew Italian, and besides, in his time translations into English had already been made of nearly all the ancient works, and of a great number of the modern ones. English poetry, too, was at this period no longer in a state of poverty and coarseness; it began through all its departments to put on a polished appearance. Spenser, who died at the commencement of Shakspeare's career, had written a long poem in a learned and ingenious style, and with a degree of elegance which, though sometimes affected, is greatly superior to the grotesque diction of our Ronsard.

It was especially after the reign of Henry the VIII, and the revolution in religion, that a powerful excitement had been given to the minds of men, that their imaginations had become heated, and that controversy had spread through the nation the want of new ideas. The Bible alone, rendered popular by the version of the yet inactive but already zealous puritans—the Bible alone was a school of poetry full of emotions and images; it almost effaced indeed, in the memory of the people, the legends and the ballads of the middle age. The psalms of David, translated into rude

[r] This is not correct; for Ben Jonson positively asserts, and no man had better opportunities for ascertaining the fact, that he had *some* knowledge both of Latin and Greek.

verse, but full of fire and spirit, formed the war-songs of the Reformation, and gave to poetry, which had hitherto been considered only as an inferior pastime for the leisure of the castle and the court, somewhat of an enthusiastic and serious tone.

At the same time, the study of the ancient languages opened an abundant source of recollections and of images, which assumed a sort of originality in being partially disfigured by the somewhat confused notions which the multitude entertained of them. Under Elizabeth, Greek and Roman erudition was the fashion of the court. All the classic authors were translated. The queen herself had put into verse the *Hercules Furens* of Seneca; and this version, though little remarkable in itself, suffices to explain the literary zeal of the nobles of her court. They became learned in order to please the queen, as, at another time, they became philosophers or devotees.

This erudition of the wits of the court was assuredly not partaken of by the people; but it showed itself in some degree at the festivals and public games. It was a perpetual mythology. When the queen visited any nobleman of her court, she was received and saluted by the Penates or Household Gods, and Mercury conducted her into the chamber of honor. All the metamorphoses of Ovid figured in the pastry of the dessert. At the evening walk the lake of the castle was covered with Tritons and Nereids, and the pages were disguised as Nymphs. When the queen hunted

in the park at break of day, she was encountered by Diana, who saluted her as the model of virgin purity. Did she make her solemn entry into the city of Norwich, Love, appearing in the midst of the grave aldermen, came to present her with a golden arrow, which, under the influence of her powerful charms, could not fail to pierce the most insensible heart; a present, says an ancient chronicle,* which her majesty, who had then reached her fortieth year, received with the most gracious acknowledgment.

These inventions of the courtiers, this official mythology of chamberlains and ministers, which formed at once a welcome flattery for the queen, and an amusing spectacle for the people, diffused a taste for the ingenious fictions of antiquity, and rendered them almost familiar to the most ignorant, as we see them even in the very pieces where Shakspeare seems most to have written for the people and for his contemporaries.

Other sources of imagination were open, other materials of poetry were prepared in the remains of popular traditions and local superstitions, which were preserved throughout all England. At the court, astrology; in the villages, sorcerers, fairies, and genii, formed a creed at once lively and all-powerful. The imagination of the English, ever prone to melancholy, retained these fables of the North as a national belief. At the same time

* Holinshed.

there were mingled with it, as attractions for more cultivated minds, the chivalrous fictions of Southern Europe, and all those wonderful relations of the Italian Muses, which a multitude of translations had introduced into the English language. Thus, on all sides, and in every sense, by the mixture of ancient and foreign ideas, by a credulous adhesion to native traditions, by learning and by ignorance, by religious reform, and by popular superstitions, were laid open a thousand perspectives for the imagination; and, without searching farther into the opinion of those writers who have called this epoch the golden age of English poetry, it may be asserted that England, emerging from barbarism, agitated in her opinions, without being disturbed by war, full of imagination and traditional lore, was then the best prepared field for the production of a great poet.

It was from the bosom of these early treasures of national literature that Shakspeare, animated by a wonderful genius, promptly formed his expressions and his style. It was the first merit that displayed itself in him, the character which first struck his contemporaries; we see it acknowledged in the surname of the *Poet honey-tongued*, which was given to him, and which we find in the rising literature of all nations, as the natural homage paid to those who first caused the charm of speech, and the harmony of language, to be more forcibly felt and understood.

This genius or talent of expression, which now forms the great character and the lasting existence

of Shakspeare, was undoubtedly that which first struck his own age. Like our Corneille, he created eloquence, and became powerful through its means. Behold the great charm which suddenly caused his dramatic pieces to be distinguished in the midst of a multitude of other plays, equally inordinate and rude, with which the English stage was at that time filled. This epoch, in truth, was peculiarly fertile in dramatic productions. Although the exterior pomp of the spectacle was very gross and imperfect, the representations were flocked to with passionate eagerness. The rage for festivals which had been created by Elizabeth, and the encreasing public prosperity of her reign, multiplied the want of such recreations. A celebrated nobleman of her court, even he whom she employed to pronounce the odious sentence on Mary Stuart, Lord Dorset[s] had composed, and had brought upon the London stage, a tragedy entitled *Gorboduc*. About the same period,[t] Marloe produced his *Tamberlaine the Greate*, *The Massacre of Paris*, and *The Tragicall Historie of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*.

It is certain, besides, that, independently of

[s] Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, was one of the commissioners for the trial of the Queen of Scots, but not present at her condemnation at Fotheringay castle. On the confirmation of her sentence, he was chosen, from the gentleness of his manners, and the tenderness of his disposition, to communicate to her the fatal tidings.

[t] Assuredly not, for Gorboduc was acted in 1561, and the earliest of the pieces mentioned here by Marloe, not until 1590.

these works known and published, there were, in the repertory of the theatres of this epoch, certain pieces by several hands, which were often retouched by the comedians themselves. It was in a labour of this kind that the dramatic genius of Shakspeare first exercised itself; and it is amongst these works of the theatrical treasury that we must range several pieces published under his name, rude indeed, like his own, but rude without genius. Such are *The Life and Death of Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *The London Prodigal*, *Pericles*, &c. We do not find them included in the chronological list which the scrupulous Malone has given of the works of Shakspeare, where, going back as far as the year 1590, he commences with *Titus Andronicus*."

From this period, Shakspeare, residing altogether in London, excepting some occasional visits which he made to his native town, gave annually to the world one or two theatrical pieces, tragedy, comedy, pastoral or fairy drama. It is very probable that his way of life was similar to that which, there is reason to think, fell to the lot of a

" *Pericles*, and the *Second* and *Third* Parts of *Henry VI.* are, doubtless, specimens of what Shakspeare could early achieve in this task of emending the works of others. But of *Titus Andronicus*, and the *First* Part of Henry VI., of *Locrine*, *The London Prodigal*, *The Puritan*, *Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, I do not believe he wrote a line, notwithstanding Schlegel, to the astonishment of all who better know these miserable dramas, has declared that "they deserve to be classed among his best and maturest works!"

comedian under the manners of that age, that is to say, obscure and free, and indemnifying himself for the want of dignity and consideration by the pursuits of pleasure.

Nevertheless his contemporaries, without giving us any of those precious details, any of those familiar anecdotes which one would wish to be able to relate of Shakspeare, render homage to his uprightness and benevolence of soul. He has himself preserved very few memorials of his theatrical career. We know that in *Hamlet* he represented the ghost in a very striking manner. He filled many other characters of the theatre, often even several in the same piece; and it is not now an uninteresting subject of curiosity, to observe on those lists of actors which precede old editions of ancient plays, the great name of Shakspeare modestly figuring amongst so many obscure ones at the head of an almost forgotten work.

There remains no detail of the favours and protection which he received from the court. We only know that Elizabeth admired his talents, and that she particularly enjoyed the humorous character of Falstaff in his *Henry* IV. It seems to our modern delicacy that the admiration of the stern Elizabeth might have been better placed, and that she whom Shakspeare gratefully calls

A fair vestal throned by the west,

might have found something else to praise in the greatest painter of the revolutions of England.

What appears more meritorious on the part of this princess, is the happy freedom which Shakspeare enjoyed in the choice of his subjects. Under the absolute power of Elizabeth, he disposes at his pleasure of the events of the reign of Henry VIII., describes his tyranny with a simplicity quite historical; and paints, in the most touching colours, the virtues and the rights of Catherine of Arragon, driven from the throne and the bed of Henry VIII. to make room for the mother of Elizabeth.

James the First showed himself not less favourable to Shakspeare. He listened with pleasure to the flattering predictions for the Stuarts which the poet had contrived to introduce into the very midst of his terrible tragedy of Macbeth; and as he was himself employed in protecting the theatre, that is to say, in rendering it less free, he wished to confide to Shakspeare the new office of director of the comedians of Black-Friars; but it was at this very period that Shakspeare, scarcely fifty years old, quitted London, and retired to his native town. He had enjoyed there for but two years the little fortune which he had amassed by his labours, when he died. His will, which has been published, and which bears the date of the year 1616, was made, he says, in the commencement of this deed, *in perfect health*. Shakspeare, after having expressed himself in a strain of much piety, disposes of several legacies in favour of his daughter Judith, of a sister, and a niece, and

finally of his wife, to whom he bequeaths his best bed with the furniture.

The reputation of Shakspeare has greatly encreased in the course of the two centuries which have elapsed since his death; and it is during this period that the admiration of his genius hath become, as it were, a national superstition. But even in his own age his loss had been deeply felt, and his memory honoured by the most striking proofs of respect and enthusiasm. Ben Jonson, his timid rival,[v] paid homage to him in some verses where he compares him to Æschylus, to Sophocles, and to Euripides, and where he cries out with all the same admiration, and nearly the same emphasis as the English critics of our own time:

> Triumph, my Britain! thou hast one to show,
> To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
> He was not of an age, but for all time;—
> Nature herself was proud of his designs,
> And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines;
> Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit.

This enthusiasm is sustained throughout the entire poem of Ben Jonson, and finishes by a kind of apotheosis of the star of Shakspeare, placed, he

[v] "Ben-Johnson, son *timide* rival." There could scarcely be an epithet more inappropriate, when applied to Ben Jonson, than what this adjective conveys; for, in fact, the warmest eulogists of honest Ben must allow that an overweening, and at times almost offensive confidence in his own talents was amongst the most glaring of his defects.

says, in the heavens, to warm the theatre for ever with the heat of its rays.

The same admiration continues to augment and diffuse itself in England; and although in the middle of the seventeenth century the horrors of civil war, and the superstitions of the puritans, by prescribing theatrical amusements, had broken off, as it were, this perpetual tradition of a glory adopted by England, we again find the remembrance of it spread throughout the land. Milton preserves it in the following lines:

> What needs my Shakspeare for his honour'd bones,
> The labour of an age in piled stones?
> Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid
> Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
> Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
> What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
> Thou, in our wonder and astonishment,
> Hast built thyself a live-long monument, &c. &c.

We see by these testimonies, and by many others which it would be easy to collect, that the admiration of Shakspeare, though for sometime weakened during the frivolity of the reign of Charles the Second, has yet never been in England the fruit of slow theory, or the tardy calculation of national vanity. It is quite sufficient, indeed, to study the plays of this extraordinary man in order to comprehend his amazing influence over the minds of his compatriots; and this same study will also enable us to discern

beauties sufficiently great to merit the admiration of every people.

The list of the undisputed pieces of Shakspeare contains thirty-six works produced in the space of twenty-five years, from 1589 to 1614. We do not see here the foolish and prodigious fecundity of a Calderon, or of a Lopez de Vega, of those inexhaustible authors whose dramas may be counted by thousands; undoubtedly still less do we find the sterile facility of our poet Hardy. Although Shakspeare, according to Ben Jonson, wrote with astonishing rapidity, and never erased what he had written, we see, by the limited number of his compositions, that they were not heaped up confusedly in his mind, that they did not proceed from it without reflection and without effort. The dramas of the Spanish poets, those pieces composed in twenty-four hours, as one of them has declared, seem always an *improvisation* favoured by the richness of the language still more than by the genius of the poet; they are, for the most part, pompous and empty, extravagant and common-place. The dramas of Shakspeare, on the contrary, unite at once the sudden flashes of genius, the sallies of enthusiasm, and the depths of meditation. All the Spanish plays have the air of a fantastic dream, of which the disorder destroys the effect, and of which the confusion indeed leaves not a trace behind. The plays of Shakspeare, notwithstanding their defects, are the work of a vigorous imagination, which leaves indelible

impressions on the mind, and gives reality and life even to his strangest caprices.

Do these observations authorise us to speak of the *dramatic system* of Shakspeare; to regard this system as justly the rival of the ancient drama, and, finally, to hold it up as a model which ought to be preferred? I think not. In reading Shakspeare with the most attentive admiration, it is impossible for me to recognise in him that system, those rules of genius which he would wish to have thought he had always followed, and which should supply for him the beautiful simplicity chosen by the happy instinct of the first tragic poets of Greece, and formed into a theory by Aristotle. Avoiding the ingenious theories invented too late,* let us return to the fact. In what state did Shakspeare find the theatre, and in what condition did he leave it? In his time tragedy was thought of simply as a representation of singular or terrible events, which succeeded one another without unity either of time or place. Scenes of buffoonery were mixed with it in imitation of the

* Alluding, no doubt, to Schlegel, who, as we well know, has attempted, and with considerable success, to prove Shakspeare the great master of the romantic drama, and that he carried to a high degree of perfection a system in many respects more congenial to nature and probability than is that of the tragic poets of Greece. It is evident, indeed, that M. Villemain cannot altogether dismiss from his mind, as objects of preference, the stately uniformity and declamatory splendour of the French theatre, nor its more than classically rigid adherence to the unities of time and place.

manners of the times, and in the same way at court the king's jester appeared in the gravest ceremonies. This manner of conceiving tragedy, more convenient for authors, more surprising, more varied for the public, was equally followed by all the tragic poets of the times. The learned Ben Jonson, younger than Shakspeare, but nevertheless his contemporary,—Ben Jonson, who knew both Greek and Latin, has precisely the same irregularities as the uneducated and unshackled Shakspeare; he alike produced upon the theatre the events of several years; he travelled from one country to another; he leaves the scene void, or changes it every moment; he mixes the sublime and the ludicrous, the pathetic and the trivial, verse and prose; he has the same system as Shakspeare, or rather, they neither of them have any system; they followed the taste of their times, they filled up familiar outlines; but Shakspeare, full of imagination, of originality and eloquence, threw into these rude and vulgar sketches a multitude of new and sublime ideas, in this resembling our Moliere, who, adopting that ridiculous story of the Banquet of Peter, which had run through all the theatres of Paris, transformed it, and enlarged it by the creation of the part of Don Juan, and by that admirable sketch of hypocrisy which he alone has latterly surpassed in his Tartufe.

Such is Shakspeare:* he has no other system

* It is not that Shakspeare was ignorant of the existence of dramatic laws. He had read many of the dramas of antiquity as

than his genius; he places under the eye of the spectator, who did not require more of him, a train of facts more or less removed from each other. He relates nothing, he brings every thing forward, and upon the scene; it was the custom of his contemporaries. Ben Jonson, Marloe, Fletcher, and Beaumont, had neither more nor less art; but often amongst *them* this excessive liberty produced only vulgar combinations; and they were frequently deficient in eloquence. In Shakspeare, even where the scenes are abrupt and without connection, they yet offer something terrible and unexpected. Those persons who meet by chance, say things which it is impossible to forget. They pass, but the remembrance of them remains; and amid the disorder of the work, the impression which the poet makes is always powerful. It is not that Shakspeare is always natural and true. Assuredly, if it is easy to detect in our French tragedy something factitious and studied; if we may blame Corneille for a tone of gallantry imposed by his age, and as foreign to the great men represented by the poet as to his own peculiar genius; if in Racine, the politeness and the pomp of the court of Louis XIV. are put in the place of the rude and simple

translated into English. In his tragedy of Hamlet, where he introduces so many things, he has not forgotten even to introduce the unities: "Behold," says Polonius, "the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited: Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ, and the liberty, these are the only men."

manners of heroic Greece,—how easy would it be to detect in Shakspeare an impropriety of manners and of language of a very different though equally offensive kind! Often what deep research after metaphorical expressions! what obscure and vain affectation! This man, who thinks and expresses himself with so much vigour, constantly employs subtile and intricate phrases, in order to express things the most simple in a manner the most laborious.[x]

It is here especially that we must call to mind the period in which Shakspeare wrote, and the imperfect education which he had received from his times, the only object notwithstanding of his study: these times, so favourable to the imagination, and so poetical, partly retained the stamp of the subtile and affected barbarism of the learned of the middle ages. In all the countries of Europe, except Italy, taste was at once rude and corrupted; school divinity and theology did not serve to reform it. The court itself of Elizabeth had something of the pedantic and affected in it, of which the influence extended throughout all England. It must be confessed that, when we read the strange speeches which King James made to his parlia-

[x] This is an unqualified, and, consequently, an incorrect statement. Shakspeare, intead of *constantly* employing subtile and intricate phrases, is frequently, and even through entire scenes, remarkable, beyond any other writer in our language, for the sweetness, simplicity, and perspicuity of his diction and numbers.

ment, we are the less astonished at the language which Shakspeare has often given to his heroes and his kings.

What we must admire is, that he has illumined this chaos with so many brilliant and astonishing flashes of genius. As for the rest, it is difficult to feel on this point all the enthusiasm of the English critics. The idolatry of the commentators on Homer has been surpassed. They have made of Shakspeare a man who, knowing nothing, had created every thing, a profound metaphysician, an incomparable moralist, the first of philosophers and poets. They have given the most subtle explanations to all the features of his poetic fancy; they have deified his most monstrous faults, and regarded even the coarseness which he received from his age as an invention of his genius. Even in the last century, Johnson, Mrs. Montagu, and Lord Kaims, piqued by the rudeness and the sallies of Voltaire, carried to a great height the refinement of their admiration, which was often, however, ingenious and correct.

Some more modern critics now reproach these their celebrated predecessors with not having felt the poetic ideal as realised by Shakspeare: they find that M. Schlegel alone approaches the truth, when he terminates the enumeration of all the wonders united in Shakspeare by these pompous words:[y] "The world of spirits and of nature have

[y] Though Schlegel be occasionally too mystical and abstracted in his criticisms on a few of the plays of Shakspeare, I

laid their treasures at his feet: a demigod in power, a prophet in the profundity of his views, a spirit surpassing in wisdom, and transcending the lot of humanity, he lowers himself to mortals as if unconscious of superiority, and is as artless and ingenuous as a child." But it is neither by the mystical subtlety of the German critic, nor by the pleasantry, and above all the translations of Voltaire, that we must judge of the genius and influence of Shakspeare. Mrs. Montagu has detected in the literal version of Julius Cæsar, numerous inadvertences, and the omission of great beauties; she has repelled the contempt of Voltaire by a judicious criticism on some defects of the French theatre; but she cannot palliate the enormous and ludicrous caprices mixed up in the pieces of Shakspeare. "Let us not forget," she remarks, "that these plays were to be acted in a paltry tavern, to an unlettered audience, just emerging from barbarity."

All the absurd improbabilities, all the buffooneries of which Shakspeare is so lavish, were common to the rude theatre which *we* possessed at the

can see nothing to object to, but as I have observed before, much to admire, in this strain of finely expressed enthusiasm. M. Villemain, it must be confessed, though upon the whole a liberal and very intelligent critic, now and then deviates into the track of Voltaire, as when, for instance, just below, he speaks of the "enormous and ludicrous caprices, the absurd improbabilities, and lavish buffooneries" of Shakspeare; charges which form a striking and truly contradictory contrast with the noble and comprehensive eulogies of the poet which, when this cant is forgotten, spontaneously escape from his lips.

same era; it was the mark of the times: why should we now admire in Shakspeare the defects which are every where else buried in oblivion, and which have survived in the English poet only on account of the sublime traits of genius with which he has surrounded them. It is necessary then, in judging of Shakspeare, first to reject the mass of rude and false taste which oppresses him; it is perhaps also necessary to avoid building systems applicable only to our own times, with these old monuments of the age of Elizabeth. If a new form of tragedy should proceed from our actual manners and the genius of some great poet, this form would no more resemble the tragedy of Shakspeare than that of Racine. When Schiller, in a German play, borrows from the Romeo of Shakspeare the lively and bold description of a sudden passion, and of a declaration of love which almost immediately leads to a *dénouement*, he violates the correctness of manners still more than the decorum of our theatre; he coldly imitates a delirium of Italian imagination. When in a dramatic poem, filled with the abstractions of our own time, and which describes that satiety of life and of science, that excessive and vague *ennui* which is the malady of extreme civilization, Goëthe amuses himself in copying the wild and rude songs of the witches in Macbeth, he produces a whimsical and extravagant, instead of a simple and terrific picture.

But if we consider Shakspeare apart, independ-

ent of the spirit of imitation and system, if we regard his genius as an extraordinary phenomenon which can never be reproduced, what admirable features does it not unfold! what passion! what poetry! what eloquence! Yet, fertile and novel as his genius is, he has most assuredly not created every thing; for nearly all his tragedies are little more than romances or chronicles of the times distributed into scenes; but he has impressed an air of originality on whatever he has borrowed: a popular story, an old ballad, touched by his powerful genius, quickens into life, is transformed, and becomes an imperishable production. An energetic painter of characters, he does not preserve them with minute accuracy; for his personages, with very few exceptions, in whatever country he places them, have the English physiognomy; and to him the people of Rome are nothing more than the populace of London. But it is precisely this want of fidelity to the local manners of different nations, this pre-occupation of English manners, which renders him so dear to his country. Never poet was more national. Shakspeare is, in fact, the genius of England personified, in his free and lofty bearing, his severity, his profundity, and his melancholy. Ought not the soliloquy of Hamlet to be the inspiration of the land of fogs and spleen? The dark ambition of Macbeth, that ambition so violent yet so premeditated,—is it not a picture wrought for that people where the throne was so

frequently waded to through seas of blood and crime?

How much is this indigenous spirit felt, nay even increased, in the subjects where Shakspeare brings before his auditory all their national remembrances, all their old customs, and all the prejudices of their country, with the proper names of its places and its men, as in Richard III., Henry VI., and Henry VIII. Let us figure to ourselves that a man of genius had sprung up at the era of the first cultivation of our language and our arts; that, expressing himself with a wild energy, he had produced upon the stage, with the licence of an action without limit, and the enthusiasm of tradition yet recent, the revengeful deeds of Louis XI., the crimes of the palace of Charles IX., the audacity of the Guises, and the furious atrocities of the League; that this poet had familiarized our chiefs, our factions, our cities, our rivers, our fields, not with the fleeting allusions and in the harmonious language of Nerestan and of Zaïre, not with the emphatic circumlocution and the modern pomp of the old French disfigured by Dubelloy, but with a rude and simple frankness, with the familiar expression of the times, never ennobled, but always animated by the genius of the painter;—would not such pieces, were they still performed, maintain an immortal authority in our literature, and an all-powerful effect on our theatre? And yet we have not, like the English, any taste for our old annals, any respect for our old manners, nor, above all,

any portion of the enthusiasm of insular patriotism.*

The theatre, besides, it must be remembered, was not in England a recreation of the court, an enjoyment reserved for refined or delicate minds; it was, and it still remains, popular. The English sailor, on his return from his long voyages, and in the intervals of his adventurous life, hastens to clap his hands at the recital of Othello, enumerating his perils and his shipwrecks. In England, where the wealth of the people affords the means of purchasing those pleasures of the theatre which Greece gratuitously offered to her free citizens, they are the people who occupy the pits of Covent-Garden and Drury-Lane. This auditory is passionately fond of the fanciful and varied spectacle which the tragedies of Shakspeare present; it feels with unspeakable force those energetic words, those bursts of passion, which break forth from the midst

* It is, I think, highly probable that the French people are about to form a very different idea of Shakspeare from that which they have hitherto been taught by their critics to entertain. An English theatre has within the last twelve months been established in Paris, and Shakspeare is not only fairly heard, but we are told even popular there. Nothing but this was wanting to dissipate prejudices unworthy of a great and enlightened nation. If we may judge, indeed, from the critiques lately published in the *Gazette de France*, a paper justly celebrated for its literary merit, this revolution in taste is nearly complete; for these critiques are not only warmly, but discriminately eulogistic of our poet, but written at the same time with great critical acumen.

of a tumultuous drama. Every thing pleases it; all is in unison with its nature, and astonishes without offending.

On the other hand, this same representation does not act with less power on the most enlightened portion of the spectators. Those rude images, those terrific descriptions, and, if I may use the expression, that tragic nakedness of Shakspeare, interest and attach the highest classes of England, even by the contrast which they offer to the security and enjoyments of their customary life: it is a violent shock which diverts and awakens souls palled and enervated by social elegance. This emotion is not suffered to subside; it is fed and supported by the most harrowing representations. Strike not out from the tragedy of Hamlet the office and the pleasantry of the grave-diggers, as Garrick had attempted to do; be present at this terrible buffoonery; you will there behold terror and mirth alternately and rapidly agitating an immense audience. By the dazzling, but somewhat sinister glimmering of the gas which enlightens the theatre, from the midst of that luxury and parade of dress which is displayed in the principal boxes, you will see the most elegant figures eagerly bending forward to witness the dreadful catastrophes exhibited on the stage. There youth and beauty contemplate with insatiable curiosity images of destruction, and the minutest details of death; and then the strange pleasantries which are blended with the fate of the persons of the drama, seem,

from time to time, to relieve the spectators from the weight which oppresses them: long peals of laughter issue from all ranks. Attentive to this spectacle, the most rigid countenances alternately become sad or gay; and we see the man of high dignity smile at the sarcasm of the grave-digger who seeks to distinguish the skull of a courtier from that of a buffoon.

Thus Shakspeare, even in those parts of his works which most offend the delicacies of taste, has for his nation an inexpressible charm. He provides for the imagination of his countrymen pleasures which never tire; he agitates, he attaches, he satisfies that taste for singularity on which England prides herself; he converses with the English only of themselves, that is to say, of almost the only thing which they esteem or love; yet, separated from his native land, Shakspeare loses not his power. It is the character of a man of genius, that the local beauties, that the individual traits with which his works abound, respond to some general type of truth and nature, and that, whilst writing for his fellow-citizens, he pleases all the world.* Perhaps even the most national works are those which are best calculated for general acceptance. Such were the works of the Greeks, who wrote only for themselves, and are read by the universe.

* A more decisive and comprehensive eulogy than this paragraph contains, as founded on the poetical character and example of Shakspeare, cannot well be imagined.

Brought up under a state of civilization less happy and less poetical, Shakspeare does not offer, in the same proportion as the Greeks, those universal beauties which pervade all languages; and none but an Englishman can place him by the side of Homer or Sophocles. Not a native of that happy climate, he has not that natural beauty of enthusiasm and of poetry. The rust of the middle age still covers him. His coarseness has something of decadency in it; it is often gothic rather than young and artless. Notwithstanding his want of education, we may discover in him something of the erudition of the sixteenth century. *It is not that amiable simplicity of the rising world,* as Fenelon somewhere says, speaking of Homer; it is a language at once rude yet studied, where one feels the labour of the human mind painfully reverting to the springs and sources of that modern civilization so diverse and so complicated, and which at its very birth appeared loaded with so many shackles and traditions.

But when Shakspeare touches on the expression of natural sentiments, when he no longer wishes to appear either laboured or subtle, when he paints man, we must confess that never passion and eloquence were carried farther. His tragic characters, from the wicked and hideous Richard III. to the thoughtful and visionary Hamlet, are real beings, who live in the imagination, and can never die.

Like all the great masters of poetry, he excels in painting what is most terrible and most graceful.

This wild and rough genius discovers an unprecedented delicacy in the delineation of female characters. The very soul of decorum and propriety resides within him on these occasions. Ophelia, Catharine of Arragon, Juliet, Cordelia, Desdemona, Imogene, figures touching and varied, possess inimitable grace, and an artless purity which would not be expected from the licence of a gross age, and the rough vigour of this masculine genius. Taste, in which he is too often deficient, is then supplied by a delicate instinct, which even enables him to discover what was wanting in the refinement of his times. Even the character of a guilty woman he has known how to qualify by some features borrowed from the observation of nature, and dictated by the tenderest sentiments. Lady Macbeth, so cruel in her ambition and in her projects, recoils with horror from the spectacle of blood: she inspires murder, but has not the courage to behold it. Gertrude, scattering flowers over the body of Ophelia, excites our commiseration notwithstanding the magnitude of her crime.

This profound truth in the delineation of primitive characters, and these shadowings of nature and of sex, so strongly marked by the poet, undoubtedly justify the admiration of the English critics; but must we conclude with them, that the forgetfulness of local colouring, so common in Shakspeare, is a matter of indifference; and that this great poet, when he confounds the language of different classes of society, when he places a

drunkard on the throne, and a buffoon in the Roman senate, has only followed nature in disdaining exterior circumstances, as the painter who, content with catching the leading character of the figure, attends not to the drapery?

This theory of too late invention, this paradox of which the original author scarcely dreamt, cannot excuse a fault too often repeated in his plays, and which presents itself there under every form. It is indeed laughable to see a learned critic, whilst examining one of Shakspeare's plays, throw himself into extacies at the happy confusion* of paganism and fairyism, of the sylphs and Ama-

* It should be observed that these blendings of ideas and customs were a thing very common before the times of Shakspeare, and that in this respect he only followed the track of his predecessors, without attempting a more critical investigation. The Thesaid of Chaucer was, without doubt, his authority. We see there, in an equal degree, the feudal manners and the superstitions of the middle age transported into Greece. Theseus, Duke of Athens, gives tournaments in honour of the ladies of that city. The poet describes at great length the armour of knights according to the fashion of his own times. We may ridicule these anachronisms as to manners, but do not our own tragedies sometimes present us with similar defects? When, instead of exhibiting Clytemnestra and Iphigenia avoiding the regards of men, and attended solely by a chorus of Greek women, Racine himself, the admirable Racine, majestically says, "Guards, follow the queen," does he not introduce the ceremonial of our own times in place of the manners of antiquity? The fault escapes us owing to the involuntary preoccupation of modern ideas. Chaucer had the same excuse for his times.

zons of ancient Greece, with the fictions of the middle age, blended by the poet in the same piece. It is yet more singular, perhaps, to see a celebrated poet of the eighteenth century imitate, learnedly and by design, this strange amalgamation, which was in Shakspeare only the effect of ignorance, or the sport of careless caprice. Let us praise a man of genius from the love of truth, and not of system. We shall then find that, if Shakspeare often violates local and historic truth; if he throws over almost all his productions the uniform hardness of the manners of his own times; he also expresses with admirable energy the ruling passions of the human heart, hatred, ambition, jealousy, the love of life, pity, and cruelty.

He does not less powerfully excite the superstitious feelings of the soul. Like the first poets of Greece, he has laid open the catalogue of physical evils, and has exposed on the stage the anguish of suffering, the very dregs of misery, the last and most frightful of human infirmities, insanity. What, in fact, can be more tragic than this apparent death of the soul, which degrades a noble being without destroying it? Shakspeare has often used these means of exciting terror, and, by a singular combination, he has represented feigned as often as real madness; finally, he has contrived to blend both in the extraordinary character of Hamlet, and to join together the light of reason, the cunning of intentional error, and the involuntary disorder of the soul.

If he has shown madness springing from despair; if he has united this image to the most poignant of all sorrows, the ingratitude of children; by a view not less profound, he has often connected crime with madness, as if the soul was alienated from itself in proportion as it became guilty. The terrible dreams of Richard III.; his sleep agitated with the convulsions of remorse; the still more frightful sleep of Lady Macbeth, or rather the phenomenon of her mysterious watching, as much out of nature as her crime;—all these inventions form the sublime of tragic horror, and surpass the *Eumenides* of Æschylus.

We may remark more than one other resemblance between the English and the old Greek poet, who knew not more of, or who respected as little, the severe law of the unities. Poetical daring is, besides, a character which strikes us not less in Shakspeare than in Æschylus: it exhibits, though under forms less polished, the same vivacity, the same intemperance of metaphor and figurative expression, the same dazzling and sublime fervor of imagination; but the incoherences of a society scarcely emerged from barbarism, constantly mingle in Shakspeare coarseness with grandeur, and we fall from the clouds into the mire. It is more particularly for his pieces of invention that the English poet has reserved that richness of colouring which seems to be natural to him. His historical pieces are more chaste, more simple, especially where the subjects are of modern

date; for when he places antiquity on the scene, he has not unfrequently overcharged both its national and individual character.

The reproach which Fenelon cast upon our theatre, of having given too much energy to the Romans, will apply yet more strongly to the *Julius Cæsar* of the English poet. Cæsar, so simple even from the elevation of his genius, scarcely ever speaks in this tragedy but in a pompous and declamatory style. But, as if to recompense us for this, what admirable truth and correctness in the part of Brutus! Does he not appear such as Plutarch represents him, the mildest of men in private life, and led by virtue alone to bold and bloody resolutions? Antony and Cassius are not represented with traits less profound and less distinct. I imagine that the genius of Plutarch had strongly possessed Shakspeare, and had placed before his eyes that reality which, for the purposes of modern times, Shakspeare took from all around him.

But a thing altogether new, altogether his own production, is the incomparable scene of Antony stirring up the Roman people to insurrection by the artifice of his language: there you behold the emotions of the populace at this harangue, those emotions always expressed in a manner so cold, so imperfect, so timid in our modern pieces, and which there are so lively and so true to nature, that they form an important part of the drama, and lead essentially towards the catastrophe.

The tragedy of *Coriolanus* is not less a faithful transcript from truth, nor less indebted to Plutarch. The haughty character of the hero, his pride as a patrician and a warrior, his disgust at the popular insolence, his hatred against Rome, his love for his mother, render him altogether the most dramatic personage in history.

There are some unworthy buffooneries in the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra;* but the moroseness of tarnished glory, that delirium of debauchery and prosperity, that fatalism of vice which blindly precipitates itself on ruin,—these assume a sort of grandeur from the force of truth. Cleopatra is certainly not a princess of our theatres any more than of history; but she is truly the Cleopatra of Plutarch, that prostitute of the East running disguised in Alexandria by night, carried to her lover on the shoulders of a slave, the fool of voluptuousness and drunkenness, yet knowing how to die with so much ease and courage.

The historical plays of Shakspeare upon national subjects are yet more true to nature; for never writer, as we have already observed, was more completely identified with his country. It is probable, however, that some of these pieces are not entirely the composition of Shakspeare, and were only vivified, as it were, by his powerful hand; like those great works of painting, where the master has thrown the most brilliant and vigorous touches over the labour of inferior artists, reserving only for himself those strokes of genius which give life and animation to the design.

Thus, in the first part of Henry VI., shines forth the incomparable scene of Talbot and his son, refusing to quit each other, and determined to perish together; a scene as simple as it is sublime, where the grandeur of the sentiment, and the vigorous conciseness of the language, rival the purest and most beautiful passages of our Corneille. But to this scene, of which the grandeur altogether consists in the elevation of the sentiments, succeeds one of great activity, such as the licence of the English theatre alone permits; and the various fortunes of an engagement multiply under every form,—the heroism of father and son, alternately rescued by each other, re-united, separated, and at length slain on the same field of battle. Nothing can surpass the vehemence and the patriotic beauty of this spectacle. The French reader alone suffers from seeing the character of Joan of Arc unworthily travestied by the gross prejudice of the poet. But this is one of those faults which form a part of the nationality of Shakspeare, and only rendered him more dear to his contemporaries.[b]

In the second part of Henry VI., some traits of a kind not less elevated mix themselves with the tumultuous variety of the drama. Such is the terrible scene where the ambitious Cardinal Beau-

[b] The First Part of Henry VI., though not totally devoid of beautiful passages, is written throughout, both as to style and versification, in a manner so completely the reverse of what we find in the genuine plays of Shakspeare, as at once to strip it of all claim to be considered as his. These discrepances, it must be recollected, are not very perceptible to a foreigner.

fort is visited on his death-bed by the king, whose confidence he has betrayed, and whose subjects he has oppressed. The delirium of the dying man, his fear of death, his silence when the king asks him if he has any hope of being saved, the whole of this picture of despair and condemnation is exclusively the property of Shakspeare.[bb] Another merit of this work, a merit unknown to, and almost irreconcileable with our stage, is the representation of popular movements, the image absolutely alive, as it were, of insurrection and sedition. There, we have nothing of the poet; we hear only the words themselves which stir up the multitude; we recognize the leader of the mob.

In his historical dramas, Shakspeare has succeeded in creating new situations. He supplies by his imagination those voids which the most faithful history almost necessarily leaves open; and we see that which it has not recorded, but that which ought to be the truth. Such is the soliloquy of Richard II. in his prison, the detail of his horrible struggle with his assassins. So in that absurd and slightly historical drama entitled *King John*, the maternal love of Constance is given with an expression truly sublime; and the scene of young Arthur disarming by his prayers and his touching simplicity the keeper who is about to put out his

[bb] This is a mistake of the French critic; for the outlines of this terrific scene, and a portion of its language, may be found in the old play of *The Contention of the Two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, probably written before the year 1590.

eyes, is at once so pathetic, so new, and so true to nature, that the conceits of language, but too familiar to the poet, cannot injure its effect.

It must be confessed that, in historical subjects, the absence of the unities,* and the long duration of the drama, admit of contrasts of great effect, and which unfold with more of strength and nature, all the extremes of human life and suffering. Thus, Richard III., the poisoner, the murderer, the tyrant, in the horror of the perils which he has raised against him, endures agonies as great as his crimes, is slowly punished on the stage, and dies as he has lived, miserable and without remorse. Thus, Cardinal Wolsey, whom the spectator had beheld a proud and all-powerful minister, the base persecutor of a virtuous queen, after having succeeded in all his designs, smitten by the royal displeasure, that incurable wound of an ambitious man, dies in such distress that he becomes almost an object of pity. Thus, Catharine of Arragon, at first triumphant and honoured amid the splendour of the court, afterwards humiliated by the charms of a young rival, re-appears to our eyes a captive in a solitary castle, consumed by languor, but courageous and yet a queen; and when, about to die, she learns the melancholy end of Cardinal Wolsey, she bestows the benediction of peace upon his memory, and seems to experience some joy, at

* We may read on this subject the striking and ingenious reflections of M. Guizot, in his Life of Shakspeare; a work remarkable for the sagacity of its historical and moral views on the state of England at the era of Elizabeth.

least, in being able to pardon the man who had done her so much injury. Our twenty-four hours are too short to include all the sorrows and all the incidents of a human life.

As to the irregularities of Shakspeare, even with respect to style, they have their advantages and effect. In that medley of prose and verse, however strange it may appear to us, the author has been almost always determined in his choice of the two modes of expressing himself by the character of the subject and situation. The delicious scene of Romeo and Juliet, the terrible dialogue between Hamlet and the spirit of his father, require the charm or the solemnity of verse: nothing of the kind is wanted in order to show Macbeth secretly conferring with the assassins. The most powerful stage effects are attached to these abrupt, to these sudden extravagances of expression, of images, of sentiments; something of the profound and of the true may be discovered in them. The cold pleasantries of the musicians in the hall adjoining the death-bed of Juliet, these spectacles of indifference and of despair so closely approaching each other, more effectually paint the nothingness of life than the uniform pomp of our theatric griefs. In short, that homely dialogue of two soldiers, in Hamlet, mounting guard, towards midnight, in a solitary place, the deep expression of their superstitious fear, their wild and artless descriptions, prepare the mind of the spectator for

the appearance of spectres and phantoms, much better than would all the illusions of poetry.

Powerful emotions, unexpected contrasts, the terrible and pathetic carried to excess, buffooneries mingled with horror, and which resemble the sardonic laugh of a dying man,—these form the leading features of the tragic drama of Shakspeare. Under these various points of view, *Macbeth*, *Romeo*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, present us with beauties nearly equal. An interest of another kind attaches itself to works in which he has lavishly displayed the inventions of the romantic style of fabling. Such is more particularly *Cymbeline*, the whimsical product of a tale of Boccaccio, and of a chapter of the Caledonian Chronicles, but a work full of spirit and of charm, where a perspicuity the most luminous reigns together with an intrigue the most complicated. In fact, it is one amongst other pieces, which are, as it were, the Saturnalia of this poet's imagination, always so irregular and so free. In England, they greatly admire that piece which one of our critics has almost overwhelmed by his arrogant reasoning. The *Tempest* appears to the English one of the most wonderful fictions of their poetry; and is it not, indeed, a powerful creation, a singularly happy union of the fantastic and the comic in the person of Caliban, that exemplification of all the most gross and low propensities, of cowardice the most servile, of meanness the most cringing? And what an infinite charm in the

contrast of Ariel, of that sylph as amiable and elegant as Caliban is perverse and misshapen! The character of Miranda belongs to that gallery of female portraits so happily designed by Shakspeare; but how does an innocence the most native, nourished in solitude, distinguish and embellish it!

In the eyes of the English, Shakspeare excels not less in comedy than in tragedy. Johnson even thought his gaity and pleasantries greatly preferable to his tragic powers. This last judgment is more than doubtful, and, at all events, can never be the opinion of foreigners. We know that nothing is so difficult to translate into another language, nothing less easily understood, than a jest or witticism. The masculine vigour and daring energy of language, the terrible and pathetic strokes of passion, may be in a great measure retained; but ridicule evaporates, and pleasantry loses all its force and grace. However, the comedies of Shakspeare, which are pieces of intrigue more than pictures of manners, almost always preserve, owing to the subject itself, a peculiar character of gaiety. Besides, there is no verisimilitude, scarcely any intention of bringing real life on the stage; and that, by the by, will explain to us why a celebrated enthusiast as to Shakspeare disdainfully accuses our Moliere of being *prosaic*, because he is a too close, a too faithful imitator of human life, as if to copy nature had been the plagiarism of mediocrity.

Shakspeare has no fault of this kind in his comedies: a complication of whimsical incidents, a

spirit of exaggeration, an almost continual caricature, a dialogue sparkling with wit and fancy, where the author appears more than the character,—these are often the results of his comic talent. It may be said that Rabelais has sometimes been indebted for his comedies to the fantastic buffoonery of his language, to the capriciousness of his inventions. The originality of Shakspeare constantly shows itself in the variety of his comic productions. *Timon of Athens* is one of the most striking; it has something of the satiric fire of Aristophanes, and something of the malignity of Lucian. An old English critic has said that the *Merry Wives of Windsor* is perhaps the only piece in which Shakspeare has given himself the trouble of conceiving and executing a plan. He has thrown into it, at least, much of fire, of whim and gaiety; he has made a near approach to the happy *prosaicism* of Moliere, in painting in expressive colours the manners, the habitudes, and the reality of life.

There is no character belonging to the tragedies of Shakspeare more admired in England, and there is none, indeed, more truly tragical, than that of Shylock in the comedy of the *Merchant of Venice*. The inextinguishable thirst of gold, his infamous and eager cruelty, the asperity of a hatred exasperated by contumely and disgrace, are traced with an incomparable energy; whilst one of those female characters so beautifully drawn by the pencil of Shakspeare, throws into the same work, and into the midst of a romantic plot, the charm of

passion. The comedies of Shakspeare have little or no moral aim; they amuse the imagination, they excite the curiosity, they divert, they astonish, but they do not convey lessons of manners more or less artfully insinuated. Some amongst them may be compared with the *Amphitryon* of Moliere; they have often the same grace, the same free and poetic cast. It is by this character of composition that we must estimate the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, an unequal but a charming piece, where fairyism furnishes to the poet a tissue of wonders alike pleasing and gay.

Shakspeare, who, notwithstanding his originality, has every where availed himself of the forms and designs of others, has also imitated the Italian pastoral of the sixteenth century, and has very delightfully brought before us those ideal dramas of rural life which the Aminta of Tasso had rendered fashionable. His piece entitled *As You Like It* is full of poetry the most enchanting, of descriptions the most light and graceful. Moliere in his *Princesse d'Elide* may give us an idea of this union of passion without truth, and of rural pictures without nature. It is a false species of fabling, agreeably touched by a man of genius. Yet, be it as it may, these productions so diverse, these efforts of imagination so various, bear witness to the richness of the genius of Shakspeare; a genius not less brilliantly discernible in that multitude of sentiments, ideas, views, and observations of every kind, which fill indiscriminately all his works, which crowd, as

it were, under his pen, and which we are able to extract even from his least happy productions.

We ought indeed to make collections of the thoughts of Shakspeare; they may be cited on every occasion and under every form; and no man who has a tincture of letters, can open his works without finding there a thousand things which he ought not to forget. In the midst of that excess of strength, of that extravagance of expression which he often gives to his characters, there are to be found traits of nature which compel us to overlook all his faults. We need not be astonished then, that, amid a nation thoughtful and intellectual, his works should be deemed the very foundation and source of their literature. Shakspeare is the Homer of the English; he is altogether national. His diction masculine and picturesque, his language enriched with imagery and bold metaphor, formed the treasury on which the elegant writers of the reign of Queen Anne amply drew. His strong and familiar pictures, his energy often trivial, his imagination excessive and without rein, continue to form the character and the ambition of English literature. In spite of philosophy and new views, the change of manners, and the progress of knowledge, Shakspeare lives in the heart of the literature of his country; he animates, he sustains it, as in this same England the old laws, the ancient forms, sustain and animate modern society. At a period when originality is on the decline, one does not look back but with increased admiration

towards this ancient model so prolific and so noble. The impression of his example, or even a natural analogy with some of the features of his genius, is still visible in the most celebrated writers of England; and he amongst them, who has the privilege of amusing all Europe, Walter Scott, well as he has observed, even with an antiquarian fidelity, those differences of manners and of customs which Shakspeare has so often confounded, ought to be ranged in his school: he is nourished by his genius; he has, both by imitation and by nature, something of his pleasantry; he sometimes rivals him in his dialogue; in short, and it is the most beautiful point of resemblance, he has the greatest affinity with Shakspeare in the grand art of creating and supporting characters, of rendering them living and familiar by the minutest details, and of making them, if I may so say, beings of this world, with a verisimilitude which nothing can efface, and which their name alone recals to me mory.[c]

[c] M. Villemain appears to have exceeded his usual strain of eloquence in these beautiful delineations of the assimilating characters of Shakspeare and Sir Walter Scott. By the translator they were read with peculiar interest, for the present volume had been arranged, and the concluding essay, with the parallel between these authors, had been written, before the work of the French critic fell into his hands. He need scarcely say how gratified he felt, not only by this corroboration of his own sentiments, but by the opportunity which was thus afforded him of introducing into his volume an essay of such masterly execution.

Behold, then, the immortal charm which for two centuries has continued to augment the renown of Shakspeare! For a long time shut up in his own country, it is only within the last half century that he has become an object of emulation to foreigners; but under this point of view his influence has necessarily less of strength and brilliancy. Copied by system, or timidly corrected, he is of no value to imitators. When he is re-produced with an affectation of barbarous irregularity, when his confusion is laboriously imitated by that experimental literature of Germany, which by turns has attempted every species of composition, and tried sometimes even barbarity itself as its last resource, he has inspired productions too often cold and extravagant, where the tone of our age has given the lie to the simulated rudeness of the poet.

When, even under the hands of the energetic Ducis, he is reduced to our classical proportions, and fettered by the restrictions of our theatre, he loses, with the freedom of his movements, all that he possesses of the grand and the astonishing for the imagination. The gigantic characters which he invented have no space to move in. His terrible action, and his extensive developements of passion, are not capable of being included within the limits of our rules. He no longer exhibits his haughtiness, his audacity; he is Gulliver bound down with innumerable threads. No longer, then, wrap up this giant in swaddling-clothes; leave him his daring gambols, his wild liberty. Mutilate not

this tree full of sap and vigour; cut not off its dark and thick branches, in order to square its naked trunk upon the uniform model of those in the gardens of Versailles.

It is to the English that Shakspeare belongs, and where he ought to remain. This poetry is not destined, like that of the Greeks, to present a model to every other people, of the most beautiful forms of imagination; it offers not that ideal beauty which the Greeks have carried into the productions of intellect, as well as into the arts of design. Shakspeare would seem fated then to enjoy a less universal fame; but the fortune and the genius of his countrymen have extended the sphere of his immortality. The English language is spoken in the peninsula of India, and throughout that half of the new world which ought to inherit from Europe at large. The numerous people of the United States have scarcely any other literature than the books of old England, and no other national theatre than the pieces of Shakspeare. They summon over sea, at an immense expense, some celebrated English actor to represent to the inhabitants of New-York those dramas of the old English poet which are calculated to act so powerfully on a free people; there they excite even more applause and enthusiasm than in the theatres of London. The popular good sense of these men, so industrious and so occupied, seizes with ardour the profound thoughts, the sagacious maxims with which Shakspeare is filled; his gigantic images

please minds accustomed to the most magnificent spectacles of nature, and to the immensity of the forests and rivers of the New World. His rudeness and inequality, his strange familiarities, offend not a society which is formed of so many different elements, which knows neither an aristocracy nor a court, and which has rather the strength and arms of civilization than its elegance and politeness.

There, as on his native soil, Shakspeare is the most popular of all writers; he is the only poet, perhaps, whose verses occasionally blend themselves with the simple eloquence and grave discourses of the American Senate. It is, above all, through him that this people, so familiarised with the coarse enjoyments of society, appears to have become acquainted with the noble enjoyment of letters which it had hitherto neglected, and indeed knew little of; and when the genius of the arts shall awaken in these countries, endowed with an aspect so poetic, but where liberty seems as yet to have inspired little save commerce, industry, and the practical sciences of life, we may expect to see the authority of Shakspeare, and the enthusiasm of his example, rule over this rising republic of literature. Thus, this comedian of the age of Elizabeth, this author esteemed so uneducated, who had himself never collected or revised his own works, rapidly composed, as they were, for obscure and rude theatres, will be the chief and model of a school of poetry which shall speak a language dif-

fused over the most flourishing half of a new world.[d]

VILLEMAIN.[e]

[d] This diffusion of the language and literature of England, and this picture of the present and future popularity of Shakspeare among the inhabitants of the United States, had been previously and somewhat similarly drawn both by Morgan and the translator of this essay; the latter, alluding to the eloquently prophetic description of the author of the Essay on Falstaff, remarks: "not twenty years had passed over the glowing predictions of Morgan, when the first transatlantic edition of Shakspeare appeared at Philadelphia; nor is it too much to believe that, ere another century elapse, the plains of Northern America, and even the unexplored wilds of Australasia, shall be as familiar with the fictions of our poet, as are now the vallies of his native Avon, or the statelier banks of the Thames.

"It is, indeed, a most delightful consideration for every lover and cultivator of our literature, and one which should excite, amongst our authors, an increased spirit of emulation, that the language in which they write is destined to be that of so large a portion of the New World; a field of glory to which the genius of Shakspeare will assuredly give an imperishable permanency; for the diffusion and durability of his fame are likely to meet with no limit save that which circumscribes the globe, and closes the existence of time."—Shakspeare and his Times, vol. ii. p. 555.

[e] Nouveaux Mélanges Historiques et Litteraires, Tome i. p. 215 ad p. 287. à Paris, 1827.

No. XVIII.

SHAKSPEARE COMPARED WITH HOMER.

THE genius of Homer has been a topic of admiration to almost every generation of men since the period in which he wrote. But his characters will not bear the slightest comparison with the delineation of the same characters as they stand in the Troilus and Cressida of Shakspeare. This is a species of honour which ought by no means to be forgotten, when we are making the eulogium of our immortal bard a sort of illustration of his greatness, which cannot fail to place it in a very conspicuous light. The dispositions of men, perhaps, had not been sufficiently unfolded in the very early period of intellectual refinement when Homer wrote; the rays of humour had not been dissected by the glass, or rendered perdurable by the pencil, of the poet. Homer's characters are drawn with a laudable portion of variety and consistency; but his Achilles, his Ajax, and his Nestor, are, each of them, rather a species than an individual, and can boast more of the propriety of abstraction than of the vivacity of a moving scene of absolute life. The Achilles, the Ajax, and the various Grecian heroes of Shakspeare on the other hand, are absolute men, deficient in nothing which

can tend to individualise them, and already touched with the Promethean fire, that might infuse a soul into what, without it, were lifeless form. From the rest, perhaps the character of Thersites deserves to be selected (how cold and school-boy a sketch in Homer!) as exhibiting an appropriate vein of sarcastic humour amidst his cowardice, and a profoundness and truth in his mode of laying open the foibles of those about him, impossible to be excelled.

Before we quit this branch of Shakspeare's praise, it may not be unworthy of our attention to advert to one of the methods by which he has attained this uncommon superiority. One of the most formidable adversaries of true poetry is an attribute which is generally miscalled dignity. Shakspeare possessed, no man in higher perfection, the true dignity and loftiness of the poetical afflatus, which he has displayed in many of the finest passages of his works with miraculous success. But he knew that no man ever was, or ever can be, always dignified. He knew that those subtler traits of character which identify a man, are familiar and relaxed, pervaded with passion, and not played off with an eternal eye to decorum. In this respect the peculiarities of Shakspeare's genius are no where more forcibly illustrated than in the play of Troilus and Cressida. The champions of Greece and Troy, from the hour in which their names were first recorded, had always worn a certain formality of attire, and marched with a

slow and measured step. No poet till this time had ever ventured to force them out of the manner which their epic creator had given them. Shakspeare first suppled their limbs, took from them the classic stiffness of their gait, and enriched them with an entire set of those attributes which might render them completely beings of the same species with ourselves.

GODWIN.[f]

[f] Life of Chaucer, octavo edition, vol. i. p. 509 ad p. 512. I have before appealed to this play (Troilus and Cressida) as a proof of Shakspeare's transcendent talent in the developement of character; and though from the nature of its fable, not one of the most pleasing or interesting of his productions, yet would it be a difficult task to select another exhibiting more profound and original traits of discrimination; and this too, notwithstanding the materials on which it is based, would appear from early and indelible classical association, to be altogether fixed and intractable. The reader, however, will in a few pages more meet a further enquiry from the pen of Mr. Godwin into the merits of this drama, as compared with Chaucer's mode of treating the same subject.

No. XIX.

ON THE SIMILITUDE BETWEEN SHAKSPEARE AND HOMER IN RELATION TO THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMAN HEART.

KNOWLEDGE of the human heart is a science of the highest dignity. It is recommended not only by its own importance, but also by this, that none but an exalted genius is capable of it. To delineate the objects of the material world requires a fine imagination, but to penetrate into the mental system, and to describe its different objects with all their distinguishing (though sometimes almost imperceptible) peculiarities, requires an imagination far more extensive and vigorous. It is this kind of imagination which appears so conspicuous in the works of Shakspeare and Homer, and which, in my opinion, raises them above all other poets whatsoever: I mean not only that talent by which they can adapt themselves to the heart of their readers, and excite whatever affection they please, in which the former plainly stands unrivalled; I mean also that wonderfully penetrating and plastic faculty, which is capable of representing every species of character, not, as our ordinary poets do, by a high shoulder, a wry mouth, or gigantic stature, but by hitting off, with a delicate hand, the distinguishing feature, and that in such a manner

as makes it easily known from all others whatsoever, however similar to a superficial eye. Hotspur and Henry V. are heroes resembling one another, yet very distinct in their characters; Falstaff, and Pistol, and Bardolph, are buffoons, but each in his own way; Desdemona and Juliet are not the same; Bottom and Dogberry, and the grave-diggers, are different characters; and the same may be said of the most similar of Homer's characters: each has some mark that makes him essentially different from the rest. But these great masters are not more eminent in distinguishing than in completing their characters. I am a little acquainted with a Cato, a Sempronius, a Tinsel, a Sir Charles Easy, &c.; but I am perfectly acquainted with Achilles, Hector, Falstaff, Lear, Pistol, and Quickly; I know them more thoroughly than any other persons of my acquaintance.

BEATTIE.[s]

[s] Forbes's Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie, LL.D. vol. i. p. 72.

No. XX.

SHAKSPEARE AND ÆSCHYLUS COMPARED.

THERE is no ancient poet that bears so close a resemblance in point of genius to any of the moderns, as Æschylus bears to Shakspeare.—Æschylus is justly styled the father of tragedy, but this is not to be interpreted as if he was the inventor of it: Shakspeare, with equal justice, claims the same title, and his originality is qualified with the same exception. The Greek tragedy was not more rude and undigested when Æschylus brought it into shape, than the English tragedy was when Shakspeare began to write; if, therefore, it be granted that he had no aids from the Greek theatre, (and I think this is not likely to be disputed,) so far these great masters are upon equal ground. Æschylus was a warrior of high repute, of a lofty generous spirit, and deep as it should seem in the erudition of his times. In all these particulars he has great advantage over our countryman, who was humbly born, and, as it is generally thought, unlearned. Æschylus had the whole epic of Homer in his hands, the Iliad, Odyssey, and that prolific source of dramatic fable, the Ilias Minor; he had also a great fabu-

lous creation to resort to amongst his own divinities, characters ready defined, and an audience whose superstition was prepared for every thing he could offer; he had, therefore, a firmer and broader stage (if I may be allowed the expression) under his feet than Shakspeare had. His fables in general are Homeric, and yet it does not follow that we can pronounce for Shakspeare that he is more original in his plots, for I understand that late researches have traced him in all, or nearly all. Both poets added so much machinery and invention of their own in the conduct of their fables, that whatever might have been the source, still their streams had little or no taste of the spring they flowed from. In point of character we have better grounds to decide, and yet it is but justice to observe that it is not fair to bring a mangled poet in comparison with one who is entire. In his divine personages Æschylus has the field of heaven, and indeed of hell also, to himself; in his heroic and military characters he has never been excelled; he had too good a model within his own bosom to fail of making those delineations natural. In his imaginary beings also he will be found a respectable, though not an equal, rival of our poet; but in the variety of character, in all the nicer touches of nature, in all the extravagances of caprice and humour, from the boldest feature down to the minutest foible, Shakspeare stands alone: such persons as he

delineates never came into the contemplation of Æschylus as a poet; his tragedy has no dealing with them; the simplicity of the Greek fable, and the great portion of the drama filled up by the chorus, allow of little variety of character; and the most which can be said of Æschylus in this particular is, that he never offends against nature or propriety, whether his cast is in the terrible or pathetic, the elevated or the simple. His versification with the intermixture of lyric composition is more various than that of Shakspeare; both are lofty and sublime in the extreme, abundantly metaphorical and sometimes extravagant:—

——— Nubes et inania captat.

This may be said of each poet in his turn; in each the critic, if he is in search for defects, will readily enough discover—

In scenam missus magno cum pondere versus.

Both were subject to be hurried on by an uncontrollable impulse, nor could nature alone suffice for either. Æschylus had an apt creation of imaginary beings at command—

He could call spirits from the vasty deep,

and they *would come*.—Shakspeare having no such creation in resource, boldly made one of his own; if Æschylus therefore was invincible, he owed it to his armour, and that, like the armour of Æneas, was the work of the gods; but the unassisted in-

jecture as to the use made by Shakspeare of the poem of Chaucer. His other sources were Chapman's translation of Homer, the Troy Book of Lydgate, and Caxton's History of the destruction of Troy. It is well known that there is no trace of the particular story of Troilus and Creseide among the ancients. It occurs indeed in Lydgate and Caxton; but the name and actions of Pandarus, a very essential personage in the tale as related by Shakspeare and Chaucer, are entirely wanting, except a single mention of him by Lydgate, and that with an express reference to Chaucer as his authority. Shakspeare has taken the story of Chaucer with all its imperfections and defects, and has copied the series of its incidents with his customary fidelity; an exactness seldom to be found in any other dramatic writer.

Since then two of the greatest writers this island has produced have treated the same story, each in his own peculiar manner, it may be neither unentertaining nor uninstructive to consider the merit of their respective modes of composition as illustrated in the present example. Chaucer's poem includes many beauties, many genuine touches of nature, and many strokes of an exquisite pathos. It is on the whole, however, written in that style which has unfortunately been so long imposed upon the world as dignified, classical, and chaste. It is naked of incidents, of ornament, of whatever should most awaken the imagination, astound the fancy, or hurry away the soul. It has the stately

march of a Dutch burgomaster as he appears in a procession, or a French poet as he shows himself in his works. It reminds one too forcibly of a tragedy of Racine. Every thing partakes of the author, as if he thought he should be everlastingly disgraced by becoming natural, inartificial, and alive. We travel through a work of this sort as we travel over some of the immense downs with which our island is interspersed. All is smooth, or undulates with so gentle and slow a variation as scarcely to be adverted to by the sense. But all is homogeneous and tiresome: the mind sinks into a state of aching torpidity; and we feel as if we should never get to the end of our eternal journey.* What a contrast to a journey among mountains and vallies, spotted with herds of various kinds of cattle, interspersed with villages, opening ever and anon to a view of the distant ocean, and refreshed with rivulets and streams; where if the eye is ever fatigued, it is only with the boundless flood of beauty which is incessantly pouring upon it! Such is the tragedy of Shakspeare.

The historical play of Troilus and Cressida exhibits as full a specimen of the different styles in which this wonderful writer was qualified to excel, as is to be found in any of his works. A more poetical passage, if poetry consists in sublime picturesque and beautiful imagery, neither ancient

* These remarks apply to nine-tenths of the poem, though by no means to those happier passages in which the author unfolds the sentiments of his personages.

nor modern times have produced, than the exhortation addressed by Patroclus to Achilles, to persuade him to shake off his passion for Polyxena, the daughter of Priam, and reassume the terrors of his military greatness:

> Sweet, rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
> Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
> And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
> Be shook to air.
>
> ACT iii, SCENE 3.

Never did morality hold a language more profound, persuasive, and irresistible, than in Shakspeare's Ulysses, who in the same scene, and engaged in the same cause with Patroclus, thus expostulates with the champion of the Grecian forces:

> For emulation hath a thousand sons,
> That one by one pursue. If you give way,
> Or hedge aside from the direct forth right,
> Like to an enter'd tide, they all rush by,
> And leave you hindmost: there you lie,
> Like to a gallant horse fallen in first rank,
> For pavement to the abject rear, o'er-run
> And trampled on.
> ——————O, let not virtue seek
> Remuneration for the thing it was!
> For beauty, wit, high birth, desert in service,
> Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
> To envious and calumniating time.
> One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,....
> That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
> And give to dust, that is a little gilt,
> More praise than they will give to gold o'erdusted.

Then marvel not, thou great and complete man!
That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax.
——— The cry went once on thee,
And still it might, and yet it may again,
If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive,
And case thy reputation in thy tent.

But the great beauty of this play, as it is of all the genuine writings of Shakspeare, beyond all didactic morality, beyond all mere flights of fancy, and beyond all sublime, a beauty entirely his own, and in which no writer, ancient or modern, can enter into competition with him, is, that his men are men; his sentiments are living, and his characters marked with those delicate, evanescent, undefinable touches, which identify them with the great delineations of nature. The speech of Ulysses just quoted, when taken by itself, is purely an exquisite specimen of didactic morality; but when combined with the explanation given by Ulysses, before the entrance of Achilles, of the nature of his design, it becomes the attribute of a real man, and starts into life. Achilles (says he)

——— stands in the entrance of his tent.
Please it our general to pass strangely by him,
As if he were forgot; and princes all,
Lay negligent and loose regard upon him:
I will come last: 'tis like, he'll question me,
Why such unplausive eyes are bent, why turn'd on him:
If so, I have derision med'cinable,
To use between your strangeness and his pride,
Which his own will shall have desire to drink.

When we compare the plausible and seemingly

affectionate manner in which Ulysses addresses himself to Achilles with the key which he here furnishes to his meaning, and especially with the epithet "derision," we have a perfect elucidation of his character, and must allow that it is impossible to exhibit the crafty and smooth-tongued politician in a more exact or animated style. The advice given by Ulysses is in its nature sound and excellent, and in its form inoffensive and kind; the name, therefore, of "derision" which he gives to it, marks to a wonderful degree the cold and self-centred subtlety of his character.

The following is a most beautiful example of the genuine Shakspearian manner, such as I have been attempting to describe; where Cressida first proceeds so far as to confess to Troilus that she loves him:

CRESSIDA.

Boldness comes to me now, and brings me heart:—
Prince Troilus, I have lov'd you night and day,
For many weary months.

TROILUS.

Why was my Cressid then so hard to win?

CRESSIDA.

Hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,
With the first glance that ever—Pardon me—
If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.
I love you now; but not, till now, so much
But I might master it:—in faith, I lie;
My thoughts were like unbridled children, grown
Too headstrong for their mother:—See, we fools!
Why have I blabb'd? Who shall be true to us,

When we are so unsecret to ourselves?
But, though I lov'd you well, I woo'd you not;—
And yet, good faith, I wish'd myself a man;
Or that we women had men's privilege
Of speaking first.—Sweet, bid me hold my tongue;
For, in this rapture, I shall surely speak
The thing I shall repent.—See, see, your silence,
Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness draws
My very soul of counsel.—Stop my mouth.

ACT iii, SCENE 2.

What charming ingenuousness, what exquisite *naïveté*, what ravishing confusion of soul, are expressed in these words! We seem to perceive in them every fleeting thought as it rises in the mind of Cressida, at the same time that they delineate with equal skill all the beautiful timidity and innocent artifice which grace and consummate the feminine character. Other writers endeavour to conjure up before them their imaginary personages, and seek with violent effort to arrest and describe what their fancy presents to them: Shakspeare alone (though not without many exceptions to this happiness) appears to have the whole train of his characters in voluntary attendance upon him, to listen to their effusions, and to commit to writing all the words, and the very words, they utter.

GODWIN.[1]

[1] Life of Chaucer, 8vo, vol. i. p. 499 et seq.

No. XXII.

SHAKSPEARE AND CALDERON COMPARED.

It is only in the first and lowest scale of the drama, that I can place those pieces in which we are presented with the visible surface of life alone, the fleeting appearance of the rich picture of the world. It is thus that I view them, even although they display the highest sway of passion in tragedy, or the perfection of all social refinements and absurdities in comedy, so long as the whole business of the play is limited to external appearances, and these things are brought before us merely in perspective, and as pictures for the purposes of drawing our attention, and awakening the sympathy of our passions. The second order of the art is that, where in dramatic representations, together with passion and the pictoric appearance of things, a spirit of more profound sense and thought is predominant over the scene, wherein there is displayed a deep knowledge, not of individuals and their affairs alone, but of our whole species, of the world and of life, in all their manifold shapes, contradictions, and catastrophes, of man and of his being. Were this profound knowledge of us and our nature the only end of dramatic poetry, Shakspeare would not merely deserve

to be called the first in his art, but there could scarcely be found a single poet, either among the ancients or the moderns, worthy for a moment to be compared with him. But in my opinion the art of the dramatic poet has, besides all this, yet another and a higher end. The enigma of life should not barely be expressed but solved; the perplexities of the present should indeed be represented, but from them our view should be led to the last developement and the final issue. The poet should entwine the future with the present, and lay before our eyes the mysteries of the internal man.—

The three worlds of Dante represent to us three great classes of human beings, some in the abyss of despair, some in the region of hope and purification, some in the enjoyment of perfect blessedness.—Corresponding to these *dénouements* of human destiny, there are also three modes of that high, serious, dramatic representation, which sets forth not merely the appearances of life, but also its deeper purpose and spirit, which gives us not only the knot but the solution of our existence. In one of these we lose sight of the hero in the darkness of a perfect destruction; in another, the conclusion, although mingled with a certain dawn of pleasure, is yet half sorrowful in its impression; and there is a third, wherein out of misery and death we see a new life arisen, and behold the illumination of the internal man. To show what I mean by dramas, whose termination is the total

ruin of their heroes, I may mention among the tragedies of the moderns, *Wallenstein*, *Macbeth*, and the *Faustus* of the people. The dramatic art of the ancients had a peculiar fondness for this altogether tragical catastrophe, which accorded well with their belief in a terrible and predestinating fate. Yet a tragedy of this kind is perhaps the more perfect in proportion as the destruction is represented not as any thing external, capricious, or predestinated, but as a darkness into which the hero has sunk step by step, descending not without free will, and in consequence of his own guilt.—Such is the case in those three great modern tragedies which I have cited.

This is, upon the whole, the favourite species among the ancients, yet their theatre is not without some beautiful specimens of the second and milder termination; examples of it occur in both of the two greatest of the Greek tragedians. It is thus that Æschylus, after he has opened before us the darkest abyss of sorrow and guilt, in the death of Agamemnon, and the vengeance of Orestes, closes his mighty picture in the Eumenides with a pleasing feeling, and the final quelling of the spirit of evil by the intervention of a milder and propitious deity. Sophocles in like manner, after representing the blindness and the fate of Œdipus, the miserable fate and mutual fratricide of his sons, the long sorrows of the sightless old man and his faithful daughter, is careful to throw a ray of cheering light upon the death of his hero, and to depict in such colours his

departure into the protection of pitying and expecting deities, as to leave upon our minds an impression rather of soothing and gentle melancholy than of tragical distress. There are many instances of the same kind both in the ancient theatre and the modern; but few wherein the working of the passions is adorned with so much beauty of poetry as in these.

The third method of dramatic conclusion, which by its representation makes a spiritual purification to be the result of external sorrows, is the one most adapted for a Christian poet, and in this the first and greatest of all masters is Calderon. Among the great variety of his pieces, I need only refer you to *the Devotion to the Cross*, and *the Stedfast Prince*, plays which have been very frequently translated, and the remarkable excellence of which has been, upon the whole, pretty generally recognised. The Christianity of this poet, however, does not consist so much in the external circumstances which he has selected, as in his peculiar feeling, and the method of treating his subject which is most common with him. Even where his materials furnish him with no opportunity of drawing the perfect developement of a new life out of death and suffering, yet every thing is conceived in the spirit of this Christian love, and every thing seen in its light, and clothed in the splendour of its heavenly colouring.

I am very far, however, from wishing to see the Spanish drama or Calderon adopted as a perfect

and exclusive model for our theatre; but I am so sensible of the high perfection to which the Christian tragedy and drama attained in the hands of that great and divine master, that I think he cannot be too much studied as a distant and inimitable specimen of excellence, by any one who would make the bold attempt to rescue the modern stage, either in Germany or elsewhere, from the feeble and ineffectual state into which it has fallen.—

The chief fault of Calderon is, that he carries us too quickly to the great *dénouement* of which I have spoken above; for the effect which this produces on us would have been very much increased by our being kept longer in doubt, had he more frequently characterised the riddle of human life with the profundity of Shakspeare,—had he been less sparing in affording us, at the commencement, glimpses of that light which should be preserved and concentrated upon the conclusion of the drama. Shakspeare has exactly the opposite fault, of too often placing before our eyes, in all its mystery and perplexity, the riddle of life, like a sceptical poet, without giving us any hint of the solution. Even when he does bring his drama to a last and a proper *dénouement*, it is much more frequently to one of utter destruction after the manner of the old tragedians, or at least to one of an intermediate and half satisfactory nature, than to that termination of perfect purification which is predominant in Calderon.—In short in every situation and circumstance, Calderon is, of all dramatic poets, the most

Christian; whilst in the deepest recesses of his feeling and thought, it has always struck me that Shakspeare is far more an ancient,—I mean an ancient not of the Greek, but of the Northern or Scandinavian cast.

FREDERICK SCHLEGEL.[j]

[j] Lectures on the History of Literature, Ancient and Modern, vol. ii. p. 130 et seq.—It is astonishing that Calderon, considering the high estimation in which he is held in his native land, is so little known in this country. A selection from his dramas, which, with his *Autos Sacramentales*, occupy fifteen volumes 4to, could not fail, I should imagine, to be well received.

No. XXIII.

SHAKSPEARE AND CORNEILLE COMPARED, WITH OBSERVATIONS ON SHAKSPEARE'S CHARACTERS IN LOW LIFE.

VOLTAIRE'S comparison of Corneille to our Shakspeare is neither judiciously nor fairly drawn. He does justice to neither. He is at evident pains, but is unable to disguise a peevish envy at his countryman's great fame, and a remarkably partial prejudice against the English poet. It is perfectly evident that he did not sufficiently understand the language, and consequently could not discern the beauties of Shakspeare; yet he pronounces many intolerable censures on him, in the tone of an absolute and authorised judge. It seems very clear that if Corneille had been able, from the nature of his language, and the taste of his cotemporaries, to disengage himself from rhyme and rigid critical rules, he would have resembled Shakspeare more than he does. If Shakspeare had laboured under *the prodigious constraint of rhyme*,* had he been constrained by a systematical art of poetry, as it is called, he would have resembled Corneille very much. However, there is a force of genius in Corneille which often surmounts the

* This is Voltaire's expression.

derangements of rhyme and rule.—Then he is the great dramatic poet, and perfectly resembles Shakspeare, who subjected himself to no rules but such as his own native genius, and judgment prescribed. To this auspicious liberty we chiefly owe the singular pleasure of reading his matchless works, and of seeing his wonderfully various and natural characters occasionally performed by excellent actors of both sexes.

It is extremely remarkable that a player never fails to acquire both fame and fortune by excelling in the proper and natural performance even of low parts in Shakspeare's capital plays, such as from Simple, the Grave-diggers, Launcelot, Dogberry, the Nurse in Romeo, Mrs. Quickley, Mine Host of the Garter, down to Doll Tear-sheet, Bardolph, and Pistol, because true pictures of nature must ever please.—The genius of a great painter is as much distinguished by an insect as a hero, by a simple cottage as by a gorgeous palace. In the course of reading Corneille's plays, I have been repeatedly struck with a pleasing recollection of similar beauties in Shakspeare. Of this I set down one example: after two of the three *Horatii* were killed, the surviving brother's dexterous retreat was reported at Rome as an inglorious defeat and flight. Old *Horatius* pours forth his rage and maledictions against the degenerate boy in high strains of poetry, and in the true character of a heroic Roman father. A friend offers rational apologies for the young man, and concludes with

saying, "what could he do against such odds," the noble answer is, "He could have died." Voltaire tells us that this sublime passage is always received by the audience, at Paris, with bursts of applause,—much to their credit. I am sure the just admirers of Shakspeare may find similar beauties in his plays. One occurs to me; it is in one of his least esteemed pieces, Henry the Sixth, Part ii, Scene 2. Lord Somerset, in company with other leaders, finding their friend, the gallant Warwick, mortally wounded on the field of battle, exclaims,

> O Warwick, Warwick, wert thou as we are,
> We might recover all our loss again.
> The Queen from France hath brought a puissant pow'r,
> Even now we heard the news.—O couldst thou fly!

The heroic Briton's answer is,

> Why then I would not fly.

Perhaps at the hazard of seeming tedious,—my real and hearty admiration for Shakspeare pushes me, irresistibly, into farther remarks on Voltaire's ill-conceived criticisms. He has partly translated Shakspeare's excellent play of Julius Cæsar, which he strangely proposes to his countrymen and all foreigners, as a proper and fair specimen upon which they may form a judgment of the original author's genius, and be fully enabled to compare him with Corneille.[k] In a note on the second

[k] Of this translation his lordship elsewhere observes: "Voltaire invites his countrymen to judge of Shakspeare's merit by

page of this feeble translation, he says, "*il faut savoir que Shakspeare avait eu peu d'éducation, qu'il avait le malheur d'être réduit à être comédien, qu'il fallait plaire au peuple, que le peuple plus riche en Angleterre qu' ailleurs fréquente les spectacles, et que Shakspeare le servait selon son goût.*"—i. e. "It must be remarked that Shakspeare had little benefit of education; that he was unfortunately reduced to become a comedian; that he found it necessary to please the populace, who in England are richer than in other countries, and frequent the theatres, and Shakspeare served them with entertainments to their taste." In another place, he says that Shakspeare introduced low characters and scenes of buffoonery to please the people, and to get money. I venture to aver, on full conviction of my own mind, that these imputations are rash, and even grossly false and injurious. Shak-

his morsel of literal translation, made, to use his own words, *mot pour mot*; and then he adds, with astonishing levity, these words, *Je n'ai qu'un mot à ajouter, c'est que les vers blancs ne coûtent que la peine de les dicter, cela n'est pas plus difficile qu'une lettre.*—i. e. 'I have only a word to add, that is, that compositions in blank verse cost only the trouble of dictating them, which is as easy as a familiar letter.' No man of common sense can wonder that a literal translation, *mot pour mot*, and written, as Voltaire boasts, with the indolence and ease of a familiar epistle, should be totally inadequate to convey any just idea of original genius. Yet I own I have been surprised to meet with some Frenchmen of reputation for taste and parts, who form their opinions on such a translation and such authority."

speare's low characters have so curious and so perfect a resemblance to nature, that they must always please, as I have observed, like masterpieces in painting; and, moreover, they never fail to illustrate and endear the great characters. Take away the odd, humorous, natural characters and scenes of Falstaff, Poins, Bardolph, Pistol, Mrs. Quickley, &c. in his two plays of Henry the IV., and particularly the common soldier, Williams, in his play of Henry the V., and I venture to affirm that you at once extinguish more than one half of our cordial esteem and admiration of that favourite hero. In the same manner, expunge from the play of Julius Cæsar the representation of a giddy, fickle, and degenerate Roman mob, and you diminish, in a very great degree, our estimation of the two noble republican characters,—the honest, sincere, philosophical Brutus, and his brave, able, and ambitious friend Cassius. The just admirers and frequent readers of Shakspeare will, on their own reflection, and without farther explanation, find that these observations, though, as far as I know, they are new, are clearly applicable to every one of his plays in which low characters are introduced. Shakspeare was incapable of deviating from the truth of nature and character to please the great, or sooth the vulgar; and no dramatic writer ever treated the common people with so much contempt. His scenes in ridicule of them are as exquisite as they are various; though Voltaire ignorantly says he courted their favour.

Of this the ludicrous characters and true comic drollery of Dogberry the constable, and his low associates, in the play of *Much Ado About Nothing*, is one proof; there is still a more precious scene, of the same kind, in that part of his play of Henry the VI., where Jack Cade and his gang deliberate on a reformation of the state: this is a singular piece of comedy and ridicule of low life, applicable to all periods and all nations; it has that character of *eternal nature* which distinguishes Shakspeare.

LORD GARDENSTONE.[1]

[1] Anderson's Bee, vol. iv. p. 291. I cannot dismiss this number without remarking that the observations on Shakspeare's characters in low life appear to me, from the judgment and ingenuity which they display, to be entitled to no slight consideration.

No. XXIV.

SHAKSPEARE AND VOLTAIRE COMPARED, AS TO THEIR USE AND MANAGEMENT OF PRETERNATURAL MACHINERY.

Is it never permitted now to admit a ghost on the scene? Is this source of the terrible, of the pitiable entirely exhausted? By no means; that would be too great a loss to the poetic art. Cannot we produce many instances where genius confounds all our philosophy by rendering things terrible to the imagination, which to the cool reason would appear perfectly ridiculous? We must reason differently then; perhaps the first principle we argue from is not well founded. "We believe no longer in apparitions." Who has said this? or rather, what does it mean when it is said? Does it signify that we are so far enlightened as to be able to demonstrate their impossibility? Are those incontestable truths which contradict the idea of such prodigies so universally spread,—are they always so much in the minds of the people, that every thing that is repugnant to them must necessarily appear ridiculous and absurd? That can never be the sense of the phrase. "We believe no longer in apparitions," then can only mean this. On a subject on which different opinions may be

supported, and which never has been and never can be decided, the prevailing opinion of the day occasions the balance to preponderate on the negative side: many individuals are convinced that there are no apparitions; a great many more pretend to be convinced; and these harangue on the subject, and give and support the fashionable doctrine. But the multitude are silent; they are indifferent on the subject; they sometimes take one side, and sometimes the other; they laugh at ghosts in broad day-light, and listen with trembling avidity at night to the terrible stories that are told of them.*

The disbelief of spectres in this sense neither can nor ought to prevent the use of them in dramatic poetry. We have all in us at least the seeds of this belief, and they will be found most in the minds of the people for whom the poet* principally composes. It depends on his art to make them vegetate, and on his address, in the rapidity of the moment to give force to the arguments in favor of the reality of these phantoms. If he suc-

* "I am too well convinced," says Mr. Pye, "of the accuracy of M. Lessing's knowledge of human nature to doubt the truth of this account of German credulity. It would have better suited this country half a century ago than at present. But, even now, there are more people who will feel the truth of it than will own it, even in England."

* Especially the dramatic poet. It is said of Moliere that he used to read all his comedies to an old female servant, and generally found her decisions confirmed by the public.—Pye.

ceeds, we may be at liberty in common life to believe as we please, but at the theatre he will be the arbiter of our faith.

Shakspeare knew this art, and he is almost the only one who ever did know it. At the appearance of HIS ghost, in Hamlet, the hair stands an end, whether it cover the brain of incredulity or superstition. M. Voltaire was much in the wrong to appeal to this ghost, which makes both him and his apparition of Ninus ridiculous. The ghost of Shakspeare really comes from the other world, at least it appears so to our feelings; for it arrives in the solemn hour, in the dead silence of midnight, accompanied by all those gloomy and mysterious accessory ideas with which our nurses have taught us to expect the appearance of spectres; while that of Voltaire's is not fit even to terrify a child. It is merely an actor who neither says nor does any thing to persuade us he is what he pretends to be: on the contrary, all the circumstances with which it appears, destroy the illusion, and betray the hand of a cold poet, who wishes indeed to deceive and terrify us, but does not know how to go about it. It is in the middle of the day,* in the

* Shakspeare knew the consequence of adapting his scenery to his action, in exciting terror by natural as well as supernatural agents:—

> The sun is in the heaven; and the proud day,
> Attended with the pleasures of the world,
> Is all too wanton and too full of gawds
> To give me audience:—if the midnight bell

middle of an assembly of the states of the empire, and preceded by a peal of thunder, that the spirit of Ninus makes its appearance from the tomb. From whence did Voltaire learn that apparitions were so bold? What old woman could not have told him that apparitions were afraid of the light of the sun, and were not fond of visiting large assemblies? Voltaire was undoubtedly acquainted with all this; but he was too cautious, too delicate, to make use of such trifling circumstances. He was desirous indeed of showing us a ghost, but he was determined it should be one of French extraction, decent and noble. This decency spoiled the whole. A spectre, who takes liberties contrary to all custom, law, and established order of ghosts, does not seem to me a genuine spectre; and, in this case, every thing that does not strengthen the illusion tends to destroy it.

If Voltaire had examined with care, he would have felt the inconveniency which on another account must attend the bringing a phantom before so many people. On its appearance, all the persons of the assembly (that is to say, all the actors who were representing the council of the queen and the states) ought to show in their countenances all the terror that the situation required; each ought even to show it differently from the rest, to avoid

> Did with his iron tongue and brazen mouth
> Sound one unto the drowsy race of night;
> If this same were a church-yard where we stand—
>
> KING JOHN.

the cold uniformity of a ballet. How could such a troop of stupid assistants be trained to this exercise? And when it had succeeded as well as possible, would not this variety of expression of the same sentiment have divided the attention of the spectators, and necessarily have drawn it from the principal characters? That these may make a strong impression on us, it is not only necessary that we should see them, but it is also proper that we should see nothing else.

In Shakspeare, it is only with Hamlet that the ghost converses. In the scene where the mother is present, the spectre is neither seen nor heard by her. All our attention then is fixed on him alone; and the more we discover in him the signs of a soul distracted by terror and surprise, the more cause we have to think the apparition which occasions such agitations, as real as he seems to believe it. The ghost* operates more on us through him than itself. The impression that it makes on him passes into our minds, and the effect is too sensible and too strong for us to doubt of an extraordinary cause. Of this secret Voltaire knew little. It is precisely because his spectre tries to terrify many people, that it produces little terror in any one.

* "Fielding makes Partridge account for his fear in the same manner. 'Not that it was the ghost that surprised me neither; for I should have known that to have been only a man in a strange dress: but when I saw the little man so frightened himself, it was that which took hold of me.'—Tom Jones, Book xvi. chap. 5."—Pye.

Semiramis cries out once only "O heaven, I die!" and the other assistants are very little more affected by the shade of Ninus than they would be by the unexpected appearance of a friend whom they believed to be at a distance.

I observe also another difference between the French and English spectre. The first is only a poetical machine solely employed to unravel the plot;* we take no interest in him. On the contrary, the other is really an efficient person of the drama, in whose fate we are interested; he excites not only terror, but compassion also.

This has probably arisen from the different manner in which these two authors have considered the general notion of apparitions. Voltaire has regarded the appearance of a dead person as a miracle, and Shakspeare as a natural event. Which

* "This intention, however, is expressly disavowed by Voltaire, and what is rather surprising, in a paragraph in which he quotes, with approbation, the celebrated rule of Horace,

Nec deus intersit nisi dignus vindice nodus.

'I would have,' he says, 'these bold attempts never employed except when they serve at the same time to add to the intrigue and the terror of the piece; and I would wish by all means that the intervention of these supernatural beings should not appear absolutely necessary. I will explain myself: if the plot of a tragic poem is so involved in difficulty, that the poet can only free himself from the embarrassment by the aid of a prodigy, the spectator will perceive the distress of the author, and the weakness of the resource.'—Dissertation on Tragedy, prefixed to Semiramis."—Pye.

of the two thought most as a philosopher, is a question that we have nothing at all to do with; but the Englishman thought most as a poet.

LESSING.[m]

[m] Dramaturgie, Part I. p. 39 et seq. Vide Pye's Commentary on the Poetic of Aristotle, p. 275 et seq.

No. XXV.

SHAKSPEARE COMPARED WITH CHAPMAN, HEYWOOD, MIDDLETON, BROOKE, SIDNEY, AND BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

WITH CHAPMAN.

Of all the English play-writers, Chapman perhaps approaches nearest to Shakspeare in the descriptive and didactic, in passages which are less purely dramatic. Dramatic imitation was not his talent. He could not go out of himself, as Shakspeare could shift at pleasure, to inform and animate other existences; but in himself he had an eye to perceive, and a soul to embrace, all forms. He would have made a great epic poet, if indeed he has not abundantly shown himself to be one; for his Homer is not so properly a translation as the stories of Achilles and Ulysses re-written. The earnestness and passion which he has put into every part of these poems, would be incredible to a reader of mere modern translations. His almost Greek zeal for the honor of his heroes is only paralleled by that fierce spirit of Hebrew bigotry, with which Milton, as if personating one of the zealots of the old law, clothed himself when he sate down to paint the acts of Sampson against the uncircumcised. The great obstacle to Chapman's

translations being read is their unconquerable quaintness. He pours out in the same breath the most just and natural and the most violent and forced expressions. He seems to grasp whatever words come first to hand during the impetus of inspiration, as if all other must be inadequate to the divine meaning. But passion (the all in all in poetry) is everywhere present, raising the low, dignifying the mean, and putting sense into the absurd. He makes his readers glow, weep, tremble, take any affection which he pleases, be moved by words or in spite of them, be disgusted and overcome their disgust. I have often thought that the vulgar misconception of Shakspeare, as of a wild irregular genius, "in whom great faults are compensated by great beauties," would be really true, applied to Chapman. But there is no scale by which to balance such disproportionate subjects as the faults and beauties of a great genius. To set off the former with any fairness against the latter, the pain which they give us should be in some proportion to the pleasure which we receive from the other. As these transport us to the highest heaven, those should steep us in agonies infernal."

" This critique on Chapman will add no little strength to the supposition of Mr. Boaden, that the magnificent eulogy on Shakspeare, commencing

A mind reflecting ages past, &c.

was the production of this fervid and energetic translator of

WITH HEYWOOD.

Heywood is a sort of *prose* Shakspeare. His scenes are to the full as natural and affecting. But we miss *the poet*, that which in Shakspeare always appears out and above the surface of *the nature*. Heywood's characters, his country gentlemen, &c., are exactly what we see (but of the best kind of what we see) in life. Shakspeare makes us believe, while we are among his lovely creations, that they are nothing but what we are familiar with, as in dreams new things seem old; but we awake, and sigh for the difference.°

Homer, especially if we recollect that the quaintness here justly complained of, is by no means constantly found in the minor pieces of Chapman.

° Of the astonishing fertility of some of the dramatic poets at this period, and of their equally astonishing indifference about the preservation of their works, the following preface of Heywood to his play, entitled "The English Traveller," will afford a most remarkable example, more peculiarly so when the reader learns that, out of the extraordinary number of pieces mentioned in this preface, only twenty-five have descended to posterity, the remainder having been in a great measure lost through the negligence of their parent.

"If, reader, thou hast of this play been an auditor, there is less apology to be used by entreating thy patience. This tragicomedy (being one reserved amongst two hundred and twenty in which I had either an entire hand, or at the least a main finger) coming *accidentally* to the press, and I having intelligence thereof, thought it not fit that it should pass as *filius populi*, a bastard without a father to acknowledge it: true it is

WITH MIDDLETON.

THOUGH some resemblance may be traced between the charms in Macbeth, and the incantations in the Witch of Middleton, which is supposed to have preceded it, this coincidence will not detract much from the originality of Shakspeare. His witches are distinguished from the witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief, might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first meet with Macbeth's, he is spell-bound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These witches can hurt the body; those have power over the

that my plays are not exposed to the world in volumes, to bear the title of works (as others), *one reason is that many of them by shifting and change of companies have been negligently lost. Others of them are still retained in the hands of some actors, who think it against their peculiar profit to have them come into print, and a third that* IT NEVER WAS ANY GREAT AMBITION IN ME TO BE IN THIS KIND VOLUMINOUSLY READ. All that I have further to say at this time is only this: censure, I entreat, as favourably as it is exposed to thy view freely.

"Ever studious of thy pleasure and profit,

Th. Heywood."

It is highly probable, I think, that such would have been precisely the reasons alleged by Shakspeare, had he been called upon to account for his inattention to, and indifference about the fate of his dramas.

soul. Hecate in Middleton has a son, a low buffoon: the hags of Shakspeare have neither child of their own, nor seem to be descended from any parent. They are foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them. Except Hecate, they have no names, which heightens their mysteriousness. The names, and some of the properties, which Middleton has given to his hags, excite smiles. The Weird Sisters are serious things. Their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But, in a lesser degree, the witches of Middleton are fine creations. Their power too is, in some measure, over the mind. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, *like a thick scurf o'er life.*

WITH FULKE GREVILLE, LORD BROOKE.

THE tragedies of Lord Brooke might with more propriety have been termed political treatises than plays. Their author has strangely contrived to make passion, character, and interest, of the highest order, subservient to the expression of state dogmas and mysteries. He is nine parts Machiavel and Tacitus for one part Sophocles or Seneca. In this writer's estimate of the faculties of his own mind, the understanding must have held a most

tyrannical pre-eminence. Whether we look into his plays, or his most passionate love-poems, we shall find all frozen and made rigid with intellect. The finest movements of the human heart, the utmost grandeur of which the soul is capable, are essentially comprised in the actions and speeches of Cælica and Camena, in his two tragedies of Alaham and Mustapha. Shakspeare, who seems to have had a peculiar delight in contemplating womanly perfection, whom for his many sweet images of female excellence all women are in an especial manner bound to love, has not raised the *ideal* of the female character higher than Lord Brooke in these two women has done. But it requires a study equivalent to the learning of a new language to understand their meaning when they speak. It is indeed hard to hit:

> Much like thy riddle, Samson, in one day
> Or seven though one should musing sit.

It is as if a being of pure intellect should take upon him to express the emotions of our sensitive natures. There would be all knowledge, but sympathetic expression would be wanting.

WITH SIDNEY AND FLETCHER.

One characteristic of the excellent old poets is their being able to bestow grace upon subjects which naturally do not seem susceptible of any. I will mention two instances: Zelmane in the Ar-

cadia of Sidney, and Helena in the *All's Well that Ends Well* of Shakspeare. What can be more unpromising at first sight than the idea of a young man disguising himself in a woman's attire, and passing himself off for a woman among women? and that too for a long space of time? yet Sir Philip has preserved such a matchless decorum, that neither does Pyrocles' manhood suffer any stain for the effeminacy of Zelmane, nor is the respect due to the princesses at all diminished when the deception comes to be known. In the sweetly constituted mind of Sir Philip Sidney, it seems as if no ugly thought nor unhandsome meditation could find a harbour. He turned all that he touched into images of honour and virtue. Helena in Shakspeare is a young woman seeking a man in marriage. The ordinary laws of courtship are reversed; the habitual feelings are violated. Yet with such exquisite address this dangerous subject is handled, that Helena's forwardness loses her no honour; delicacy dispenses with her laws in her favour, and Nature in her single case seems content to suffer a sweet violation.

Aspatia in the *Maid's Tragedy* of Beaumont and Fletcher, is a character equally difficult with Helena of being managed with grace. She too is a slighted woman, refused by the man who had once engaged to marry her. Yet it is artfully contrived that, while we pity her, we respect her, and she descends without degradation. So much true

poetry and passion can do to confer dignity upon subjects which do not seem capable of it. But Aspatia must not be compared at all points with Helena; she does not so absolutely predominate over her situation but she suffers some diminution, some abatement of the full lustre of the female character, which Helena never does: her character has many degrees of sweetness, some of delicacy, but it has weakness which if we do not despise, we are sorry for.—

I have always considered *Ordella*, in the *Thierry and Theodoret* of Fletcher, the most perfect idea of the female heroic character, next to Calantha in the Broken Heart of Ford,[p] that has been embodied in fiction. She is a piece of sainted nature. Yet, noble as the whole scene is, it must be confessed that the manner of it, compared with Shakspeare's finest scenes, is slow and languid. Its motion is circular, not progressive. Each line revolves on itself in a sort of separate orbit. They do not join into one another like a running hand. Every step that we go, we are stopped to admire some single object, like walking in beautiful scenery with a guide. This slowness I shall elsewhere have occasion to remark as characteristic of Fletcher. Another

[p] Of this dramatist Mr. Lamb, in a note to a scene from his Broken Heart, has justly said that "he was of the first order of poets. He sought for sublimity not by parcels in metaphors or visible images, but directly where she has her full residence in the heart of man; in the actions and sufferings of the greatest minds."

striking difference perceivable between Fletcher and Shakspeare, is the fondness of the former for unnatural and violent situations. He seems to have thought that nothing great could be produced in an ordinary way. The chief incidents in *The Wife for a Month*, in *Cupid's Revenge*, in *The Double Marriage*, and in many more of his tragedies, show this. Shakspeare had nothing of this contortion in his mind, none of that craving after romantic incidents, and flights of strained and improbable virtue, which I think always betrays an imperfect moral sensibility.

There are some scenes in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* of Fletcher which give strong countenance to the tradition that Shakspeare had a hand in this play.[q] They have a luxuriance in them which strongly resembles Shakspeare's manner in those parts of his plays where, the progress of the interest being subordinate, the poet was at leisure for description. I might fetch instances from Troilus and Timon. That Fletcher should have copied Shakspeare's manner through so many entire scenes, (which is the theory of Mr. Steevens,) is not very probable; that he could have done it with such facility is to me not certain. His ideas ('*as I have before remarked*') moved slow; his versifica-

[q] It was ascribed, in the title-page, to Fletcher and Shakspeare in 1634, only sixteen years after the death of the latter. Fletcher was nearly contemporary with Shakspeare. He was born twelve years later (in 1576), and died nine years after him (in 1625).

tion, though sweet, is tedious; it stops every moment; he lays line upon line, making up one after the other, adding image to image so deliberately that we see where they join: Shakspeare mingles every thing; he runs line into line, embarrasses sentences and metaphors; before one idea has burst its shell, another is hatched and clamorous for disclosure. If Fletcher wrote some scenes in imitation, why did he stop? or shall we say that Shakspeare wrote the other scenes in imitation of Fletcher? that he gave Shakspeare a curb and a bridle, and that Shakspeare gave him a pair of spurs; as Blackmore and Lucan are brought in exchanging gifts in the Battle of the Books.—

The wit of Fletcher is excellent, like his serious scenes; but there is something strained and farfetched in both. He is too mistrustful of Nature; he always goes a little on one side of her. Shakspeare chose her without a reserve, and had riches, power, understanding, and long life, with her, for a dowry.

CHARLES LAMB.[r]

[r] The comparisons which form this number are taken from a volume entitled "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, who lived about the Time of Shakspeare," published by Mr. Charles Lamb, in the year 1808. They are included in the notes accompanying these specimens, and are, in my opinion, though miniatures, remarkable for their justness of comparative delineation, and their uncommon beauty and felicity of language. They are, in fact, gems of the purest water.

MEMORIALS OF SHAKSPEARE.

PART III.

No. I.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEMPEST OF SHAKSPEARE.

Writers of a mixed character, that abound in transcendent beauties and in gross imperfections, are the most proper and most pregnant subjects for criticism. The regularity and correctness of a Virgil or Horace almost confine their commentators to perpetual panegyric, and afford them few opportunities of diversifying their remarks by the detection of latent blemishes. For this reason, I am inclined to think that a few observations on the writings of Shakspeare will not be deemed useless or unentertaining, because he exhibits more numerous examples of excellence and faults of every kind, than are, perhaps, to be discovered in any other author. I shall, therefore, examine his merit as a poet, without blind admiration or wanton invective.

As Shakspeare is sometimes blameable for the conduct of his fables, which have no unity, and sometimes for his diction, which is obscure and turgid, so his characteristical excellences may possibly be reduced to these three general heads: 'his lively creative imagination; his strokes of nature and passion; and his preservation of the

consistency of his characters.' These excellences, particularly the last, are of so much importance in the drama, that they amply compensate for his transgressions against the rules of *time* and *place*, which, being of a more mechanical nature, are often strictly observed by a genius of the lowest order; but to portray characters naturally, and to preserve them uniformly, requires such an intimate knowledge of the heart of man, and is so rare a portion of felicity, as to have been enjoyed, perhaps, only by two writers, Homer and Shakspeare.

Of all the plays of Shakspeare, the *Tempest* is the most striking instance of his creative power. He has there given the reins to his boundless imagination, and has carried the romantic, the wonderful, and the wild, to the most pleasing extravagance. The scene is a desolate island; and the characters the most new and singular that can well be conceived: a prince who practises magic, an attendant spirit, a monster the son of a witch, and a young lady who had been brought to this solitude in her infancy, and had never beheld a man except her father.

As I have affirmed that Shakspeare's chief excellence is the consistency of his characters, I will exemplify the truth of this remark, by pointing out some master-strokes of this nature in the drama before us.

The poet artfully acquaints us that Prospero is a magician, by the very first words which his daughter Miranda speaks to him:

If by your art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them:

which intimate that the tempest described in the preceding scene was the effect of Prospero's power. The manner in which he was driven from his dukedom of Milan, and landed afterwards on this solitary island, accompanied only by his daughter, is immediately introduced in a short and natural narration.

The offices of his attendant spirit, Ariel, are enumerated with amazing wildness of fancy, and yet with equal propriety: his employment is said to be,

——— To tread the ooze
Of the salt deep;
To run upon the sharp wind of the north;
To do—business in the veins o' th' earth,
When it is bak'd with frost;
——— to dive into the fire; to ride
On the curl'd clouds.

In describing the place in which he has concealed the Neapolitan ship, Ariel expresses the secresy of its situation by the following circumstance, which artfully glances at another of his services:—

——— In the deep nook, where once
Thou call'st me up at midnight, to fetch dew
From the still-vex'd Bermudas.

Ariel, being one of those elves or spirits, 'whose pastime is to make midnight mushrooms, and who rejoice to listen to the solemn curfew;' by whose

assistance Prospero has bedimmed the sun at noon-tide,

> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault,
> Set roaring war;

has a set of ideas and images peculiar to his station and office; a beauty of the same kind with that which is so justly admired in the Adam of Milton, whose manners and sentiments are all paradisaical. How delightfully, and how suitably to his character, are the habitations and pastimes of this invisible being pointed out in the following exquisite song!

> Where the bee sucks, there lurk I:
> In a cowslip's bell I lie;
> There I couch when owls do cry.
> On the bat's back I do fly,
> After sun-set, merrily.
> Merrily merrily shall I live now,
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

Mr. Pope, whose imagination has been thought by some the least of his excellences, has, doubtless, conceived and carried on the machinery in his 'Rape of the Lock,' with vast exuberance of fancy. The images, customs, and employments of his sylphs, are exactly adapted to their natures, are peculiar and appropriated, are all, if I may be allowed the expression, *sylphish*. The enumeration of the punishments they were to undergo, if they neglected their charge, would, on account of its poetry and propriety, and especially the

mixture of oblique satire, be superior to any circumstances in Shakspeare's Ariel, if we could suppose Pope to have been unacquainted with the Tempest when he wrote this part of his accomplished poem.

——She did confine thee
Into a cloven pine; within which rift
Imprisoned, thou did'st painfully remain
A dozen years; within which space she dy'd,
And left thee there; where thou did'st vent thy groans,
As fast as mill-wheels strike.

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,
And peg thee in his knotty entrails, 'till
Thou'st howl'd away twelve winters.

For this, besure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stiches that shall pen thy breath up: urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch'd
As thick as honey-combs, each pinch more stinging
Than bees that made 'em.

If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps;
Fill all thy bones with aches: make thee roar,
That beasts shall tremble at thy din.

SHAKSPEARE.

Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,
Forsakes his post, or leaves the fair at large,
Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins,
Be stopp'd in vials, or transfix'd with pins;
Or plung'd in lakes of bitter washes lie,
Or wedg'd whole ages in a bodkin's eye:
Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain,
While clog'd he beats his silken wings in vain;
Or alum styptics with contracting pow'r,

Shrink his thin essence like a shrivell'd flower:
Or as Ixion fix'd, the wretch shall feel
The giddy motion of the whirling wheel;
In fumes of burning chocolate shall glow,
And tremble at the sea that froths below.—POPE.

The method which is taken to induce Ferdinand to believe that his father was drowned in the late tempest, is exceedingly solemn and striking. He is sitting upon a solitary rock, and weeping over-against the place where he imagined his father was wrecked, when he suddenly hears with astonishment aerial music creep by him upon the waters, and the spirit gives him the following information in words not proper for any but a spirit to utter.

Full fathom five thy father lies:
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change,
Into something rich and strange.

And then follows a most lively circumstance;

Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.
Hark! now I hear them—ding-dong-bell!

This is so truly poetical, that one can scarce forbear exclaiming with Ferdinand,

This is no mortal business, nor no sound
That the earth owns!—

The happy versatility of Shakspeare's genius enables him to excel in lyric as well as in dramatic poesy.

But the poet rises still higher in his management of this character of Ariel, by making a moral use of it, that is, I think, incomparable, and the greatest effort of his art. Ariel informs Prospero that he has fulfilled his orders, and punished his brother and companions so severely, that if he himself was now to behold their sufferings, he would greatly compassionate them. To which Prospero answers,

——— Dost thou think so, Spirit?
ARIEL. Mine would, sir, were I human.
PROSPERO. And mine shall.

He then takes occasion, with wonderful dexterity and humanity, to draw an argument from the incorporeality of Ariel, for the justice and necessity of pity and forgiveness:

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions; and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passion'd as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?

The poet is a more powerful magician than his own Prospero: we are transported into fairy land; we are wrapped in a delicious dream, from which it is misery to be disturbed; all around is enchantment!

——— The isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices;
That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then in dreaming,

The clouds, methought, would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me: when I wak'd,
I cry'd to dream again!

JOSEPH WARTON.[a]

[a] Adventurer, No. 93, September 25th, 1753. These observations on the Tempest, written about seventy-five years ago, and in a work of great popular acceptation, contributed not a little to refix the attention of all classes on our admirable poet; nor, though occasionally insisting somewhat too much on a strict adherence to the rules of the classical drama, have they been on the whole superseded or surpassed by any subsequent critique on the same play.

No. II.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEMPEST CONCLUDED.

'WHOEVER ventures,' says Horace, 'to form a character totally original, let him endeavour to preserve it with uniformity and consistency; but the formation of an original character is a work of great difficulty and hazard.' In this arduous and uncommon task, however, Shakspeare has wonderfully succeeded in his Tempest: the monster Caliban is the creature of his own imagination, in the formation of which he could derive no assistance from observation or experience.

Caliban is the son of a witch, begotten by a demon: the sorceries of his mother were so terrible, that her countrymen banished her into this desert island as unfit for human society; in conformity, therefore, to this diabolical propagation, he is represented as a prodigy of cruelty, malice, pride, ignorance, idleness, gluttony, and lust. He is introduced with great propriety cursing Prospero and Miranda, whom he had endeavoured to defile; and his execrations are artfully contrived to have reference to the occupation of his mother:

> As wicked dew, as e'er my mother brush'd
> With raven's feather from unwholesome fen,
> Drop on you both!————————

> ————All the charms
> Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!

His kindness is, afterwards, expressed as much in character as his hatred, by an enumeration of offices that could be of value only in a desolate island, and in the estimation of a savage.

> I pr'ythee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
> And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;
> Show thee a jay's nest; and instruct thee how
> To snare the nimble marmozet. I'll bring thee
> To clust'ring filberds; and sometimes I'll get thee
> Young sea-malls from the rock——
> I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries;
> I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.

Which last is, indeed, a circumstance of great use in a place where to be defended from the cold was neither easy nor usual; and it has a farther peculiar beauty, because the gathering wood was the occupation to which Caliban was subjected by Prospero, who, therefore, deemed it a service of high importance.

The gross ignorance of this monster is represented with delicate judgment: he knew not the names of the sun and moon, which he calls the bigger light and the less; and he believes that Stephano was the man in the moon, whom his mistress had often shown him; and when Prospero reminds him that he first taught him to pronounce articulately, his answer is full of malevolence and rage:

> You taught me language; and my profit on't
> Is, I know how to curse:——

the properest return for such a fiend to make for such a favour. The spirits whom he supposes to be employed by Prospero perpetually to torment him, and the many forms and different methods they take for this purpose, are described with the utmost liveliness and force of fancy:

> Sometimes like apes, that moe and chatter at me,
> And after bite me; then like hedgehogs, which
> Lie tumbling in my bare-foot way, and mount
> Their pricks at my foot-fall: sometimes am I
> All wound with adders, who with cloven tongues
> Do hiss me into madness.

It is scarcely possible for any speech to be more expressive of the manners and sentiments, than that in which our poet has painted the brutal barbarity and unfeeling savageness of this son of Sycorax, by making him enumerate, with a kind of horrible delight, the various ways in which it was possible for the drunken sailors to surprise and kill his master:

> ——— There thou may'st brain him,
> Having first seiz'd his books; or with a log
> Batter his skull; or paunch him with a stake;
> Or cut his wezand with thy knife.——

He adds, in allusion to his own abominable attempt, 'above all be sure to secure the daughter; whose beauty,' he tells them, 'is incomparable.' The charms of Miranda could not be more exalted

than by extorting this testimony from so insensible a monster.

Shakspeare seems to be the only poet who possesses the power of uniting poetry with propriety of character; of which I know not an instance more striking than the image Caliban makes use of to express silence, which is at once highly poetical, and exactly suited to the wildness of the speaker:

> Pray you tread softly, that the blind mole may not
> Hear a foot-fall. ——

I always lament that our author has not preserved this fierce and implacable spirit in Caliban to the end of the play; instead of which, he has, I think injudiciously, put into his mouth words that imply repentance and understanding:

> ——— I'll be wise hereafter,
> And seek for grace. What a thrice double ass
> Was I, to take this drunkard for a God,
> And worship this dull fool?

It must not be forgotten that Shakspeare has artfully taken occasion from this extraordinary character, which is finely contrasted to the mildness and obedience of Ariel, obliquely to satirize the prevailing passion for new and wonderful sights, which has rendered the English so ridiculous. 'Were I in England now,' says Trinculo, on first discovering Caliban, 'and had but this fish painted, not an holiday-fool there but would give a piece of silver.—When they will not give a

doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian.'

Such is the inexhaustible plenty of our poet's invention, that he has exhibited another character in this play, entirely his own; that of the lovely and innocent Miranda.

When Prospero first gives her a sight of Prince Ferdinand, she eagerly exclaims,

> ——— What is't? a spirit?
> Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,
> It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.

Her imagining that, as he was so beautiful, he must necessarily be one of her father's aerial agents, is a stroke of nature worthy admiration; as are likewise her intreaties to her father not to use him harshly, by the power of his art:

> Why speaks my father so ungently? This
> Is the third man that e'er I saw; the first
> That e'er I sigh'd for!

Here we perceive the beginning of that passion which Prospero was desirous she should feel for the prince, and which she afterwards more fully expresses upon an occasion which displays at once the tenderness, the innocence, and the simplicity of her character. She discovers her lover employed in the laborious task of carrying wood, which Prospero had enjoined him to perform. 'Would,' says she, 'the lightning had burnt up those logs that you are enjoined to pile!'

——— If you'll sit down,
I'll bear your logs the while. Pray give me that,
I'll carry't to the pile.——
——— You look wearily.

It is by selecting such little and almost imperceptible circumstances, that Shakspeare has more truly painted the passions than any other writer: affection is more powerfully expressed by this simple wish and offer of assistance, than by the unnatural eloquence and witticisms of Dryden, or the amorous declamations of Rowe.

The resentment of Prospero for the matchless cruelty and wicked usurpation of his brother; his parental affection and solicitude for the welfare of his daughter, the heiress of his dukedom; and the awful solemnity of his character, as a skilful magician; are all along preserved with equal consistency, dignity, and decorum. One part of his behaviour deserves to be particularly pointed out: during the exhibition of a mask with which he had ordered Ariel to entertain Ferdinand and Miranda, he starts suddenly from the recollection of the conspiracy of Calibán and his confederates against his life, and dismisses his attendant spirits, who instantly vanish to a hollow and confused noise. He appears to be greatly moved; and suitably to this agitation of mind, which his danger has excited, he takes occasion, from the sudden disappearance of the visionary scene, to moralise on the dissolution of all things:

——— These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits; and

Are melted into air, into thin air.
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.

To these noble images he adds a short but comprehensive observation on human life, not excelled by any passage of the moral and sententious Euripides:

——— We are such stuff
As dreams are made of; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep!

Thus admirably is an uniformity of character, that leading beauty in dramatic poesy, preserved throughout the Tempest. And it may be farther remarked that the unities of action, of place, and of time, are in this play, though almost constantly violated by Shakspeare, exactly observed. The action is one, great, and intire, the restoration of Prospero to his dukedom: this business is transacted in the compass of a small island, and in or near the cave of Prospero; though, indeed, it had been more artful and regular to have confined it to this single spot; and the time which the action takes up is only equal to that of the representation; an excellence which ought always to be aimed at in every well-conducted fable, and for

the want of which a variety of the most entertaining incidents can scarcely atone.'

JOSEPH WARTON."

' In regard to the necessity for a strict observance of the unities of time and place, we must here make some allowance for the classical prejudices of Dr. Warton, who has certainly rated their importance much beyond that to which they are entitled. The following remarks of a recent and very sensible critic may be quoted as an excellent corrective of the Doctor's Aristotelian bias. " Of the three unities of action, time, and place," he observes, " which Aristotle had deemed indispensable, the first I have always thought important to every composition, as consisting in the relation of every incident to some great action or end; and it is no less necessary to preserve it in epic poetry than in tragedy. It is essential even to history, for the detail of two narratives at once, or the intermixture of them can only serve to confuse.

" The second unity is that of time, which (according to those absurd critics who have merely copied from the imperfect sketches left by the ancients) requires that a play should occupy no more time in the supposed action than it does in the representation. Unity of place, (according to the same prejudiced judges, who never looked at the origin of the prejudice,) required that the scene should be never shifted from one place to another. By observing the first of these, the ancients had great difficulty to find any interesting events which could be supposed to be acted in so short a time; on this account, Aristotle himself, who was a slave to precedent, was obliged to change the time, and allowed them twenty-four hours.

" That they might not violate the third unity, they were obliged to fix their action in some public place, such as a court or area before a palace; on which account much business was transacted there which ought to have been done in private.

" The truth is, these two last unities arose out of the imper-

fection of the Greek drama. As the chorus never left the stage, the curtain was not let down between the acts. Shakspeare understood nature better than those pedantic critics who have extolled the unities of Aristotle; and surely, according to the modern custom, the spectators can, with no degree of violence upon the imagination while the action is suspended, suppose a certain time to elapse between the acts; and by a very small effort of the imagination, they can also suppose themselves transported, or the scene shifted, from one place to another.

"Upon the whole then, it is plain the moderns have judged rightly in laying aside the chorus; and Shakspeare, who rejected the unities of time and place, has produced the best dramas."

Letters on Literature, Taste, and Composition, by George Gregory, D. D. In two volumes, London, 1808. Vol. 2. p. 224, et seq.

I need scarcely remind any reader of Shakspeare that Dr. Johnson, in his admirable preface to his edition of the bard, was one of the first to exert his great critical abilities in support of the licence practised by our poet as to the unities of time and place.

[a] Adventurer, No. 97. October 9, 1753.

No. III.

OBSERVATIONS ON KING LEAR.

One of the most remarkable differences betwixt ancient and modern tragedy, arises from the prevailing custom of describing only those distresses that are occasioned by the passion of love; a passion which, from the universality of its dominion, may doubtless justly claim a large share in representations of human life; but which, by totally engrossing the theatre, had contributed to degrade that noble school of virtue into an academy of effeminacy.

When Racine persuaded the celebrated Arnauld to read his Phædra, 'Why,' said that severe critic to his friend, 'have you falsified the manners of Hippolitus, and represented him in love?'—'Alas!' replied the poet, 'without that circumstance, how would the ladies and the beaux have received my piece?' And it may well be imagined, that to gratify so considerable and important a part of his audience, was the powerful motive that induced Corneille to enervate even the matchless and affecting story of Œdipus, by the frigid and impertinent episode of Theseus's passion for Dirce.

Shakspeare has shown us, by his Hamlet, Macbeth, and Cæsar, and, above all, by his Lear, that

very interesting tragedies may be written, that are not founded on gallantry and love; and that Boileau was mistaken when he affirmed,

——— de l'amour la sensible peinture,
Est pour aller au cœur la route la plus sure.

Those tender scenes that pictur'd love impart,
Insure success and best engage the heart.

The distresses in this tragedy are of a very uncommon nature, and are not touched upon by any other dramatic author. They are occasioned by a rash resolution of an aged monarch of strong passions and quick sensibility, to resign his crown, and to divide his kingdom amongst his three daughters; the youngest of whom, who was his favourite, not answering his sanguine expectations in expressions of affection to him, he for ever banishes, and endows her sisters with her allotted share. Their unnatural ingratitude, the intolerable affronts, indignities, and cruelties he suffers from them, and the remorse he feels from his imprudent resignation of his power, at first inflame him with the most violent rage, and by degrees drive him to madness and death. This is the outline of the fable.

I shall confine myself at present to consider singly the judgment and art of the poet, in describing the origin and progress of the distraction of Lear, in which, I think, he has succeeded better than any other writer; even than Euripides himself,

whom Longinus so highly commends for his representation of the madness of Orestes.

It is well contrived that the first affront that is offered Lear should be a proposal from Gonerill, his eldest daughter, to lessen the number of his knights, which must needs affect and irritate a person so jealous of his rank and the respect due to it. He is at first astonished at the complicated impudence and ingratitude of this design, but quickly kindles into rage, and resolves to depart instantly:

> ——— Darkness and devils!
> Saddle my horses, call my train together—
> Degen'rate bastard! I'll not trouble thee.—

This is followed by a severe reflection upon his own folly for resigning his crown, and a solemn invocation to Nature to heap the most horrible curses on the head of Gonerill, that her own offspring may prove equally cruel and unnatural:

> ——— that she may feel,
> How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child!

When Albany demands the cause of this passion, Lear answers, 'I'll tell thee!' but immediately cries out to Gonerill,

> ——— Life and death! I am asham'd,
> That thou hast power to shake my manhood thus.
> ——— Blasts and fogs upon thee!
> Th' untented woundings of a father's curse
> Pierce every sense about thee!

He stops a little, and reflects:

> ————Ha! is it come to this?
> Let it be so! I have another daughter,
> Who, I am sure, is kind and comfortable.
> When she shall hear this of thee, with her nails
> She'll flea thy wolfish visage.————

He was, however, mistaken; for the first object he encounters in the castle of the Earl of Gloucester, whither he fled to meet his other daughter, was his servant in the stocks; from whence he may easily conjecture what reception he is to meet with:

> ——— Death on my state! Wherefore
> Should he sit here?

He adds immediately afterwards,

> O me, my heart! my rising heart!—but down.

By which single line the inexpressible anguish of his mind, and the dreadful conflict of opposite passions with which it is agitated, are more forcibly expressed than by the long and laboured speech, enumerating the causes of his anguish, that Rowe and other modern tragic writers would certainly have put into his mouth. But Nature, Sophocles, and Shakspeare, represent the feelings of the heart in a different manner; by a broken hint, a short exclamation, a word, or a look:

> They mingle not, 'mid deep-felt sighs and groans,
> Descriptions gay, or quaint comparisons,
> No flow'ry far-fetch'd thoughts their scenes admit;
> Ill suits conceit with passion, woe with wit.

Here passion prompts each short expressive speech;
Or silence paints what words can never reach.

J. W.

When Jocasta, in Sophocles, has discovered that Œdipus was the murderer of her husband, she immediately leaves the stage; but in Corneille and Dryden she continues on it during a whole scene, to bewail her destiny in set speeches. I should be guilty of insensibility and injustice, if I did not take this occasion to acknowledge, that I have been more moved and delighted by hearing this single line spoken by the only actor of the age who understands and relishes these little touches of nature, and therefore the only one qualified to personate this most difficult character of Lear, than by the most pompous speeches in Cato or Tamerlane.[v]

[v] That Garrick, who is here alluded to, had great merit in giving to his representation of Lear a more natural, touching, and impassioned tone than had previously been effected, tradition has uniformly asserted; nor was the acting of Mr. Kemble in this part perhaps less entitled to praise; but, notwithstanding the efforts of these accomplished performers, I cannot but be of opinion with Mr. Lamb, where, speaking of the almost insuperable difficulty of justly representing this sublimely impassioned character, he tells us, in language which may be said to form a most magnificent picture of the afflicted monarch, that "they (the actors) might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano; they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his

In the next scene, the old king appears in a very distressful situation. He informs Regan, whom he believes to be still actuated by filial tenderness, of the cruelties he had suffered from her sister Gonerill in very pathetic terms:

——— Beloved Regan,
Thy sister's naught.—O Regan! she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, here.
I scarce can speak to thee—thou'lt not believe,
With how deprav'd a quality—O Regan!

It is a stroke of wonderful art in the poet to represent him incapable of specifying the particular ill usage he has received, and breaking off thus abruptly, as if his voice was choked by tenderness and resentment.

When Regan counsels him to ask her sister for-

mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on, even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear,—we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks or tones to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*, when in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that 'they themselves are old?' What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with these things?"—Lamb's Works, vol. 2, p. 25.

giveness, he falls on his knees with a very striking kind of irony, and asks her how such supplicating language as this becometh him:

> Dear daughter, I confess that I am old;
> Age is unnecessary: on my knees I beg,
> That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food.

But being again exhorted to sue for reconciliation, the advice wounds him to the quick, and forces him into execrations against Gonerill, which, though they chill the soul with horror, are yet well suited to the impetuosity of his temper:

> She hath abated me of half my train;
> Look'd black upon me; struck me with her tongue,
> Most serpent-like, upon the very heart—
> All the stor'd vengeances of heaven fall
> On her ungrateful top! Strike her young bones,
> Ye taking airs, with lameness!—
> Ye nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
> Into her scornful eyes!

The wretched king, little imagining that he is to be outcast from Regan also, adds very movingly;

> ———'Tis not in thee
> To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train,
> To bandy hasty words, to scant my sizes.—
> ———Thou better know'st
> The offices of nature, bond of childhood—
> Thy half o'th' kingdom thou hast not forgot,
> Wherein I thee endow'd——

That the hopes he had conceived of tender usage from Regan should be deceived, heightens his distress to a great degree. Yet it is still aggra-

vated and increased by the sudden appearance of Gonerill; upon the unexpected sight of whom he exclaims,

——Who comes here? O heavens!
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause, send down and take my part!

This address is surely pathetic beyond expression; it is scarce enough to speak of it in the cold terms of criticism. There follows a question to Gonerill, that I have never read without tears:

Ar't not asham'd to look upon this beard?

This scene abounds with many noble turns of passion, or rather conflicts of very different passions. The inhuman daughters urge him in vain, by all the sophistical and unfilial arguments they were mistresses of, to diminish the number of his train. He answers them by only four poignant words:

I gave you all!

When Regan at last consents to receive him, but without any attendants, for that he might be served by her own domestics, he can no longer contain his disappointment and rage. First he appeals to the Heavens, and points out to them a spectacle that is, indeed, inimitably affecting:

You see me here, ye gods! a poor old man,
As full of griefs as age, wretched in both:
If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely!

Then suddenly he addresses Gonerill and Regan in the severest terms, and with the bitterest threats:

——— No, you unnatural hags!
I will have such revenges on you both—
That all the world shall—I will do such things—
What they are yet, I know not—

Nothing occurs to his mind severe enough for them to suffer, or him to inflict. His passion rises to a height that deprives him of articulation. He tells them that he will subdue his sorrow, though almost irresistible; and that they shall not triumph over his weakness:

——— You think I'll weep!
No! I'll not weep; I have full cause of weeping:
But this heart shall break into a thousand flaws,
Or e'er I'll weep!

He concludes,

O fool—I shall go mad!—

which is an artful anticipation, that judiciously prepares us for the dreadful event that is to follow in the succeeding acts.

JOSEPH WARTON.*

* Adventurer, No. 113, December 4, 1753.

No. IV.

OBSERVATIONS ON KING LEAR CONTINUED.

THUNDER and a ghost have been frequently introduced into tragedy by barren and mechanical play-wrights, as proper objects to impress terror and astonishment, where the distress has not been important enough to render it probable that nature would interpose for the sake of the sufferers, and where these objects themselves have not been supported by suitable sentiments. Thunder has, however, been made use of with great judgment and good effect by Shakspeare, to heighten and impress the distresses of Lear.

The venerable and wretched old king is driven out by both his daughters, without necessaries and without attendants, not only in the night, but in the midst of a most dreadful storm, and on a bleak and barren heath. On his first appearance in this situation, he draws an artful and pathetic comparison betwixt the severity of the tempest and of his daughters:

> Rumble thy belly full! spit, fire! spout, rain!
> Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters.
> I tax not you, ye elements, with unkindness;
> I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children;
> You owe me no subscription. Then let fall

> Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand your slave;
> A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man!

The storm continuing with equal violence, he drops for a moment the consideration of his own miseries, and takes occasion to moralize on the terrors which such commotions of nature should raise in the breast of secret and unpunished villainy:

> ——————— Tremble, thou wretch!
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes
> Unwhipt of justice! Hide thee, thou bloody hand,
> Thou perjur'd, and thou similar of virtue
> That art incestuous!—
> ——— Close pent-up guilts
> Rive your concealing continents, and cry
> These dreadful summoners grace!—

He adds, with reference to his own case,

> ——— I am a man
> More sinn'd against, than sinning.

Kent most earnestly intreats him to enter a hovel which he had discovered on the heath; and on pressing him again and again to take shelter there, Lear exclaims,

> Wilt break my heart?——

Much is contained in these four words; as if he had said, 'the kindness and the gratitude of this servant exceeds that of my own children. Though I have given them a kingdom, yet have they basely discarded me, and suffered a head so old and

white as mine to be exposed to this terrible tempest, while this fellow pities and would protect me from its rage. I cannot bear this kindness from a perfect stranger; it breaks my heart.' All this seems to be included in that short exclamation, which another writer, less acquainted with nature, would have displayed at large: such a suppression of sentiments, plainly implied, is judicious and affecting. The reflections that follow are drawn likewise from an intimate knowledge of man:

> When the mind's free,
> The body's delicate: the tempest in my mind
> Doth from my senses take all feeling else,
> Save what beats there ————

Here the remembrance of his daughters' behaviour rushes upon him, and he exclaims, full of the idea of its unparalleled cruelty,

> ———— Filial ingratitude!
> Is it not, as this mouth should tear this hand
> For lifting food to it!

He then changes his style, and vows with impotent menaces, as if still in possession of the power he had resigned, to revenge himself on his oppressors, and to steel his breast with fortitude:

> ———— But I'll punish home.
> No, I will weep no more!——

But the sense of his sufferings returns again, and he forgets the resolution he had formed the moment before:

In such a night,
To shut me out!—Pour on, I will endure—
In such a night as this!——

At which, with a beautiful apostrophe, he suddenly addresses himself to his absent daughters, tenderly reminding them of the favours he had so lately and so liberally conferred upon them:

——— O Regan, Gonerill,
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all!—
O that way madness lies; let me shun that;
No more of that!

The turns of passion in these few lines are so quick and so various, that I thought they merited to be minutely pointed out by a kind of perpetual commentary.

The mind is never so sensibly disposed to pity the misfortunes of others, as when it is itself subdued and softened by calamity. Adversity diffuses a kind of sacred calm over the breast, that is the parent of thoughtfulness and meditation. The following reflections of Lear in his next speech, when his passion has subsided for a short interval, are equally proper and striking:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er ye are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm!
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these!

He concludes with a sentiment finely suited to his condition, and worthy to be written in charac-

ters of gold in the closet of every monarch upon earth:

> ——— O! I have ta'en
> Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp!
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel;
> That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
> And show the Heavens more just!

Lear being at last persuaded to take shelter in the hovel, the poet has artfully contrived to lodge there Edgar, the discarded son of Gloucester, who counterfeits the character and habit of a mad beggar, haunted by an evil demon, and whose supposed sufferings are enumerated with an inimitable wildness of fancy; 'Whom the foul fiend hath led through fire, and through flame, through ford and whirlpool, o'er bog and quagmire; that hath laid knives under his pillow, and halters in his pew; set ratsbane by his porridge; made him proud of heart, to ride on a bay trotting horse over four-inched bridges, to course his own shadow for a traitor.—Bless thy five wits, Tom's a cold!' The assumed madness of Edgar, and the real distraction of Lear, form a judicious contrast.[x]

Upon perceiving the nakedness and wretchedness of this figure, the poor king asks a question that I never could read without strong emotions of pity and admiration:

[x] Nothing can exceed the minute accuracy with which the commencement and progress of the insanity of Lear is drawn by this consummate master of the human heart—it is a study even for the pathologist!

> What! have his daughters brought him to this pass?
> Could'st thou save nothing? Did'st thou give them all?

And when Kent assures him that the beggar hath no daughters, he hastily answers;

> Death, traitor, nothing could have subdued nature
> To such a lowness, but his unkind daughters.

Afterwards, upon the calm contemplation of the misery of Edgar, he breaks out into the following serious and pathetic reflection: 'Thou wert better in thy grave, than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three of us are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more than such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here.'

Shakspeare has no where exhibited more inimitable strokes of his art than in this uncommon scene, where he has so well conducted even the natural jargon of the beggar, and the jestings of the fool, which in other hands must have sunk into burlesque, that they contribute to heighten the pathetic to a very high degree.

The heart of Lear having been agitated and torn by a conflict of such opposite and tumultuous passions, it is not wonderful that his 'wits should now begin to unsettle.' The first plain indication of the loss of his reason is his calling Edgar a

'learned Theban;' and telling Kent that 'he will keep still with his philosopher.' When he next appears, he imagines he is punishing his daughters. The imagery is extremely strong, and chills one with horror to read it;

> To have a thousand with red burning spits
> Come hizzing in upon them!—

As the fancies of lunatics have an extraordinary force and liveliness, and render the objects of their frenzy as it were present to their eyes, Lear actually thinks himself suddenly restored to his kingdom, and seated in judgment to try his daughters for their cruelties:

> I'll see their trial first; bring in the evidence.
> Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;
> And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,
> Bench by his side. You are of the commission,
> Sit you too. Arraign her first, 'tis Gonerill—
> And here's another, whose warp'd looks proclaim
> What store her heart is made of.—

Here he imagines that Regan escapes out of his hands, and he eagerly exclaims,

> ——— Stop her there.
> Arms, arms, sword, fire—Corruption in the place!
> False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape?

A circumstance follows that is strangely moving indeed; for he fancies that his favourite domestic creatures, that used to fawn upon and caress him, and of which he was eminently fond, have now their tempers changed, and join to insult him:

——— The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see! they bark at me.

He again resumes his imaginary power, and orders them to anatomize Regan; 'See what breeds about her heart.—Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts! You, Sir,' speaking to Edgar, 'I entertain for one of my Hundred;' a circumstance most artfully introduced to remind us of the first affront he received, and to fix our thoughts on the causes of his distraction.

General criticism is on all subjects useless and unentertaining, but is more than commonly absurd with respect to Shakspeare, who must be accompanied step by step, and scene by scene, in his gradual developements of characters and passions, and whose finer features must be singly pointed out, if we would do complete justice to his genuine beauties. It would have been easy to have declared, in general terms, 'that the madness of Lear was very natural and pathetic;' and the reader might then have escaped, what he may, perhaps, call a multitude of well-known quotations: but then it had been impossible to exhibit a perfect picture of the secret workings and changes of Lear's mind, which vary in each succeeding passage, and which render an allegation of each particular sentiment absolutely necessary.

JOSEPH WARTON.[7]

[7] Adventurer, No. 116, December 15, 1753.

No. V.

OBSERVATIONS ON KING LEAR CONCLUDED.

MADNESS being occasioned by a close and continued attention of the mind to a single object, Shakspeare judiciously represents the resignation of his crown to daughters so cruel and unnatural, as the particular idea which has brought on the distraction of Lear, and which perpetually recurs to his imagination, and mixes itself with all his ramblings. Full of this idea, therefore, he breaks out abruptly in the Fourth Act: 'No, they cannot touch me for coining: I am the king himself.' He believes himself to be raising recruits, and censures the inability and unskilfulness of some of his soldiers: 'There's your press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper: draw me a clothier's yard. Look, look, a mouse! Peace, peace: this piece of toasted cheese will do it.' The art of our poet is transcendent in thus making a passage that even borders on burlesque, strongly expressive of the madness he is painting. Lear suddenly thinks himself in the field; 'there's my gauntlet—I'll prove it on a giant!'—and that he has shot his arrow successfully: 'O well-flown barb! i'th clout, i'th clout: hewgh! give the word.' He then recollects the falsehood and cruelty of his

daughters, and breaks out in some pathetic reflections on his old age, and on the tempest to which he was so lately exposed: 'Ha! Gonerill, ha! Regan! They flattered me like a dog, and told me I had white hairs on my beard, ere the black ones were there. To say, Ay, and No, to every thing that I said—Ay and No too, was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once, and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding; there I found 'em, there I smelt 'em out. Go to, they're not men of their words; they told me I was every thing: 'tis a lie, I am not ague-proof.' The impotence of royalty to exempt its possessor, more than the meanest subject, from suffering natural evils, is here finely hinted at.

His friend and adherent Gloster, having been lately deprived of sight, enquires if the voice he hears is not the voice of the king; Lear instantly catches the word, and replies with great quickness,

> ——————Ay, every inch a king;
> When I do stare, see how the subject quakes;
> I pardon that man's life. What was thy cause?
> Adultery? no, thou shalt not die; die for adultery?

He then makes some very severe reflections on the hypocrisy of lewd and abandoned women, and adds, 'Fie, fie, fie; pah, pah; give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination;' and as every object seems to be present to the eyes of the lunatic, he thinks he pays for the drug: 'there's money for thee!' Very strong and

lively also is the imagery in a succeeding speech, where he thinks himself viewing his subjects punished by the proper officer:

> Thou rascal bedel, hold thy bloody hand:
> Why dost thou lash that whore? strip thy own back;
> Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind
> For which thou whip'st her!

This circumstance leads him to reflect on the efficacy of rank and power, to conceal and palliate profligacy and injustice; and this fine satire is couched in two different metaphors, that are carried on with much propriety and elegance:

> Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
> Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
> And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
> Arm it in rags, a pigmy straw doth pierce it.

We are moved to find that Lear has some faint knowledge of his old and faithful courtier:

> If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
> I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloster.

The advice he then gives him is very affecting:

> Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:
> Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air
> We wawle and cry.—
> When we are born, we cry that we are come
> To this great stage of fools!

This tender complaint of the miseries of human life bears so exact a resemblance with the following passage of Lucretius, that I cannot forbear transcribing it:

> Vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut equum est,
> Cui tantum in vita restet transire malorum.
>
> Then with distressful cries he fills the room,
> Too sure presages of his future doom.
>
> DRYDEN.

It is not to be imagined that our author copied from the Roman; on such a subject it is almost impossible but that two persons of genius and sensibility must feel and think alike. Lear drops his moralities, and meditates revenge:

> It were a delicate stratagem to shoe
> A troop of horse with felt. I'll put't in proof;
> And when I've stol'n upon these sons-in-law,
> Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill.

The expedient is well suited to the character of a lunatic, and the frequent repetitions of the word 'kill' forcibly represent his rage and desire of revenge, and must affect an intelligent audience at once with pity and terror. At this instant Cordelia sends one of her attendants to protect her father from the danger with which he is threatened by her sisters: the wretched king is so accustomed to misery, and so hopeless of succour, that when the messenger offers to lead him out, he imagines himself taken captive and mortally wounded:

> No rescue? what! a prisoner? I am e'en
> The nat'ral fool of fortune: use me well,
> You shall have ransom. 'Let me have surgeons;
> I am cut to the brain.—

Cordelia at length arrives; an opiate is administered to the king, to calm the agonies and agitations

of his mind; and a most interesting interview ensues between this daughter, that was so unjustly suspected of disaffection, and the rash and mistaken father. Lear, during his slumber, has been arrayed in regal apparel, and is brought upon the stage in a chair, not recovered from his trance. I know not a speech more truly pathetic than that of Cordelia when she first sees him:

> Had you not been their father, these white flakes
> Did challenge pity of them. Was this a face
> To be expos'd against the warring winds?

The dreadfulness of that night is expressed by a circumstance of great humanity; for which kind of strokes Shakspeare is as eminent as for his poetry:

> My very enemy's dog,
> Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
> Against my fire. And wast thou fain, poor father,
> To hovel thee with swine, and rogues forlorn,
> In short and musty straw?——

Lear begins to awake; but his imagination is still distempered, and his pain exquisite;

> You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave:
> Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
> Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
> Do scald like molten lead.—

When Cordelia in great affliction asks him if he knows her, he replies,

> You are a spirit, I know; when did you die?

This reply heightens her distress; but his sensibility beginning to return, she kneels to him, and begs his benediction. I hope I have no readers that can peruse his answer without tears:

——— Pray do not mock me:
I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upwards; and to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man,
Yet I am doubtful: for I'm mainly ignorant
What place this is.—Do not laugh at me;
For as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia. ——

The humility, calmness, and sedateness of this speech, opposed to the former rage and indignation of Lear, is finely calculated to excite commiseration. Struck with the remembrance of the injurious suspicion he had cherished against this favourite and fond daughter, the poor old man intreats her 'not to weep,' and tells her that 'if she has prepared poison for him, he is ready to drink it;' 'for I know,' says he, 'you do not, you cannot love me, after my cruel usage of you: your sisters have done me much wrong, of which I have some faint remembrance: you have some cause to hate me, they have none.' Being told that he is not in France, but in his own kingdom, he answers hastily, and in connection with that leading idea which I have before insisted on, 'Do not abuse me'—and adds, with a meekness and contrition that are very pathetic, 'Pray now forget and forgive; I am old and foolish.'

Cordelia is at last slain: the lamentations of Lear are extremely tender and affecting; and this accident is so severe and intolerable, that it again deprives him of his intellect, which seemed to be returning.

His last speech, as he surveys the body, consists of such simple reflections as nature and sorrow dictate:

> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more;
> Never, never, never, never, never!—

The heaving and swelling of his heart is described by a most expressive circumstance:

> Pray you undo this button. Thank you, Sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her, look on her lips:
> Look there, look there— *Dies.*

I shall transiently observe, in conclusion of these remarks, that this drama is chargeable with considerable imperfections. The plot of Edmund against his brother, which distracts the attention, and destroys the unity of the fable; the cruel and horrid extinction of Gloster's eyes, which ought not to be exhibited on the stage; the utter improbability of Gloster's imagining, though blind, that he had leaped down Dover cliff; and some passages that are too turgid and full of strained metaphors; are faults which the warmest admirers of Shakspeare will find it difficult to excuse.* I know not,

* The objection which is here made by Dr. Warton to the secondary plot in Lear, as destroying the unity of the fable, and

also, whether the cruelty of the daughters is not painted with circumstances too savage and unna-

to the occasional barbarity of the scene, will be found, I think, satisfactorily replied to by the following remarks of the ingenious Schlegel. "The story of Lear and his daughters," he observes, "was left by Shakspeare exactly as he found it in a fabulous tradition, with all the features characteristical of the simplicity of old times. But in that tradition, there is not the slightest trace of the story of Gloster and his sons, which was derived by Shakspeare from another source. The incorporation of the two stories has been censured as destructive of the unity of action. But whatever contributes to the intrigue or the *dénouement*, must always possess unity. And with what ingenuity and skill the two main parts of the composition are dovetailed into one another! The pity felt by Gloster for the fate of Lear becomes the means which enables his son Edmund to effect his complete destruction, and affords the outcast Edgar an opportunity of being the saviour of his father. On the other hand, Edmund is active in the cause of Regan and Gonerill; and the criminal passion which they both entertain for him, induces them to execute justice on each other, and on themselves. The laws of the drama have therefore been sufficiently complied with; but that is the least: it is the very combination which constitutes the sublime beauty of the work. The two cases resemble each other in the main: an infatuated father is blind towards his well-disposed child, and the unnatural offspring, to whom he gives the preference, requite him by the destruction of his entire happiness. But all the circumstances are so different, that these stories, while they make an equal impression on the heart, form a complete contrast for the imagination. Were Lear alone to suffer from his daughters, the impression would be limited to the powerful compassion felt by us for his private misfortune. But two such unheard of examples taking place at the same time, have the appearance of a great commotion in the moral world: the picture becomes

tural; for it is not sufficient to say that this monstrous barbarity is founded on historical truth, if we recollect the just observation of Boileau,

> Le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas vraisemblable.
>
> Some truths may be too strong to be believed.
>
> SOMES.

JOSEPH WARTON.[a]

gigantic, and fills us with such alarm as we should entertain at the idea that the heavenly bodies might one day fall out of their regular orbits. To save, in some degree, the honour of human nature, Shakspeare never wishes that his spectators should forget that the story takes place in a dreary and barbarous age. He lays particular stress on the circumstance that the Britons of that day were still heathens, although he has not made all the remaining circumstances to coincide learnedly with the time which he has chosen. From this point of view, we must judge of many coarsenesses in expression and manners; for instance, the immodest manner in which Gloster acknowledges his bastard; Kent's quarrel with the steward; and more especially the cruelty personally exercised on Gloster by the Duke of Cornwall. Even the virtue of the honest Kent bears the stamp of an iron age, in which the good and the bad display the same ungovernable strength."—Lectures on Dramatic Literature, Vol 2, p. 206.

[a] Adventurer, No. 122, January 5th, 1754.

No. VI.

CRITICAL REMARKS ON OTHELLO.

Of those who possess that superiority of genius which enables them to shine by their own strength, the number has been few. When we take a review of mankind in this respect, we behold a dark and extended tract, illuminated with scattered clusters of stars, shedding their influence, for the most part, with an unavailing lustre. So much however are mankind formed to contemplate and admire whatever is great and resplendent, that it cannot be said that these luminaries have exhibited themselves to the world in vain. Whole nations, as well as individuals, have taken fire at the view of illustrious merit, and have been ambitious in their turn to distinguish themselves from the common mass of mankind. And since, by the happy invention of printing, we have it in our power to gather these scattered rays into one great body, and converge them to one point, we complain without reason of not having light enough to guide us through the vale of life.

Among those to whom mankind is most indebted, the first place is perhaps due to Homer and to Shakspeare. They both flourished in the infancy of society, and the popular tales of the

times were the materials upon which they exerted their genius; they were equally unassisted by the writings of others: the dramatic compositions with which Shakspeare was acquainted, were as contemptible as the crude tales which served as the foundation of Homer's poem. The genius of both poets was then of undoubted originality, and varied as the scene is with which they were conversant. It cannot perhaps be said that an idea is to be found in their works, imitated from another. To whatever subject they turned their attention, a picture of nature, such as was capable of filling their minds alone, arose in full prospect before them. An idea imagined by any other would be inadequate to the grasp of their genius, and uncongenial with their usual mode of conception.[b] Intimately acquainted with the original fountains of human knowledge, accustomed themselves to trace the operations of nature, they disdained to take notice of, or submit to the obscure and imperfect

[b] This is certainly going somewhat too far: that poetry existed before the age of Homer, there can be little doubt; he himself, in fact, has referred to Thamyris, (Il. B. 594), and Linus, (Il. Σ. 570), as masters in the art; and that he did not avail himself, in some degree, of their productions, is scarcely to be credited. With regard to Shakspeare, we positively know that he has not only frequently adopted, expanded, and improved the thoughts of his predecessors, but has sometimes even taken the skeleton or outline of their pieces, as framework for his own more highly finished pictures; of which, indeed, it may, without exaggeration, be said that they leave all comparison behiad them.

tracts which had been marked out by an inferior pencil. They walked alone and in their own strength, and wherever they have trod, have left marks which time will never efface, or, perhaps, which no superior splendor of genius will obscure or eclipse, but will ever continue to be the highest objects of human ambition and admiration.

But however high the merit of Shakspeare must be, in thus classing him with Homer, it would not be doing justice to either of these fathers of genius to appreciate their respective abilities by merely asserting them to be poets of the first order. The genius of Homer was undoubtedly superior in point of greatness and fire; the most awful and interesting scenes among mankind were the continual subjects of his song; the hurry and grandeur of battle, the strength of mighty heroes, and all the violence of passion, seem to be the high delight of his soul. Like his rival in modern times, he was conspicuous for a display of character; but these were chiefly of the warlike kind: the steady magnanimity of Agamemnon, the irresistible fury of Achilles, the prudent valour of Ulysses, and the bodily strength of Ajax, are painted in strong and striking colours; and though he be not deficient in those of a more humble and amiable kind, yet in this sphere Homer, and every other writer, ancient or modern, are left far behind by Shakspeare, whose merit in this respect is indeed astonishing. He hath described the great and the ludicrous, the good and the bad, with equal

facility, in all their shades of character, and in every scene of human life. Succeeding writers have seldom mentioned his name without the epithet of *Inimitable*, and with much justice; for there have not been wanting in the English language dramatic writers of merit, who were not insensible to the singular abilities of Shakspeare; but of what writer except himself can it be said, that no imitation has been attempted? None of his characters have been assumed; his simplicity, his sentiments, and even his style is altogether his own. In imitating Homer, many writers have not been unsuccessful. Virgil in beauty and tenderness has exceeded him. Tasso in strength of description has often equalled him; but none has yet, in any degree, appropriated the spirit and the manner of Shakspeare.[c]

In every work of this great author, we discover all the marks of his genius, his diversity of character, his boundless imagination, his acute discernment, and his nervous expression; but in none of them are these qualities more conspicuous than in the tragedy of *Othello;* a work also, the freest from his irregularities, his puns, his bombast and conceits. No where has he painted virtue with more flaming sublimity than in the character

[c] Unqualified as this last assertion may appear, it is one nevertheless to which we are compelled, in the present day, to accede; nor may it, perhaps, be hazarding too much to add, that posterity will, in all probability, have not much more to boast of in this respect than ourselves.

of Othello; with more amiable tenderness than in that of Desdemona; and no where are all the artifices of human nature more fully displayed than in the character of Iago: from the whole, he has contrived a plot the most moral in its tendency, which winds up to the highest pitch our sympathetic feelings in concern for unsuspicious virtue, and at the same time rouses our utmost indignation against deep-laid villainy. From a review of the conduct of the poet in producing such a noble effect, we may expect much pleasure and improvement.

It may be observed of the productions of a profound mind, that, like the source from whence they proceed, they are not apprehended at first sight. Shakspeare often begins his deepest tragedies with the lowest buffoonery of the comic kind, with conversations among the inferior characters, that do not seem to be connected with the main plot; and there is often introduced throughout the work the opinions of those engaged about the lower offices, about the principal actors, and the great designs that are carrying on; and their inadequate conceptions have an excellent effect in enlivening the story; for besides the humour that is thereby produced, it elucidates the subject by placing it in a variety of lights. Examples of such a conduct are frequent in all our author's works, and are not to be expected but from that extensive capacity which is capable at once to view the subject in its rise and progress,

and connected with all its circumstances; which can take a wide range into the affairs of men without losing sight of the principal action, and whose comprehensive grasp can obtain many auxiliary ideas and many remote designs, without distracting or driving out the great tendency of the whole. Writers of a more limited capacity, conscious of their want of strength to construct an edifice on such an enlarged plan, and confused at the wild disorder of the materials as they lie scattered through nature, generally rush headlong among them, and introduce darkness where confusion only was before: having once heated their imaginations, they foam away till they suppose the work is completed, and in such high-wrought raptures as darkness and confusion are but too apt to produce. One prevailing sentiment runs through the whole; in every speech, according as the character is well or ill affected to the success of the adventure, it is blazoned forth with all the passion the author can command; and the whole mass is often chiefly illuminated with many dazzling words of wonder, and terror, and amazement. Were the subject of Othello to be managed in the French mode, or by their English imitators, we might expect, in an introductory soliloquy, to see the nature of jealousy, with all its dire effects, explained with much pomp of language, perhaps by the personage who is chiefly concerned in the story, or by a female confidant observing all at once the altered mind of her lord; and the same subject would be

the continual theme from speech to speech, till the fatal conclusion, which never fails to be caused by some long-expected and obvious discovery. During the course of the representation, the wearied spectator, instead of that tumultuous joy which is produced by the agitation of hope and fear, is only amused at times with the inferior pleasure of poetical description, and many laboured attempts to excite the mind by pathetic and sublime sentiments. Though often interrupted by different speakers, it is no other than an uninteresting and declamatory poem, where, if there is any display of character, it is but in general terms, of a man splendidly good, or on the contrary, outrageously wicked; of a fair female, gentle and amiable, and of her fierce and haughty oppressor.—The qualities of good and bad are sometimes expressed with much vigour and fire, but the rest of the man is wanting; the imagination cannot lay hold on a distinct and natural character, intermixed with some foibles, which never fail to attend the best, with a peculiar bias of mind towards a particular object, or the prejudices which are expected to be found from the profession, the situation, or any of the circumstances of his life. The few who have succeeded in this sphere, is a proof, that to excel in it requires a genius of the highest and most finished kind. The enthusiasm of imagination, and the calm and minute observation of judgment, qualities so plainly requisite, are seldom found united in any high degree among mankind.

The characters which make a chief figure in the tragedy of Othello, are the Moor himself, Desdemona, and Iago. The subject is, the destruction of Desdemona; and this catastrophe the author never loses sight of. It is indeed remarkable for unity of action, which of all the three unities is of principal consequence. Unity of time and place peculiar to this species of composition, arises from the nature of dramatic representation, the action being supposed to be in view of spectators for a moderate space of time. But a strict attention to the unities of time and place has never been completely attained by any writer. When an action is to be represented, of such importance as to awaken, keep alive, and at last gratify curiosity, it must necessarily give rise to many incidents; and in these incidents, if consistent with nature and probability, in different places and with different intervals, much time is spent, and much is done behind the curtain, which cannot be brought in review: such liberties never offend the reader, and seldom the spectator; and when a certain degree of liberty is thought proper, the writer may go a considerable length without offending our sense of propriety; and we partly consider it as dramatic narration. To be scrupulously attentive to the unities of time and place, confines the genius of the writer, makes the work barren of incidents, and consequently less interesting: much must be forced and improbable, and the internal merit and beauty of the story must be sacrificed to the external and artificial nature of representation.

Those who contend for a strict resemblance of the artificial action to the story, require what can never take place: the scene is often changed on the same spot, and it matters very little whether from one room of the palace to another, or from London to York, as both are equally impossible; and the same may be said of supposing five minutes, when we well know it is really five hours; it may, without much greater improbability, be protracted to five weeks. A natural train of incidents can scarcely be expected from a story accommodated to the strict rules of the stage. They must be dull, few, and uniform, because they are all in some measure within view, and comprehended at first sight; and in place of incident, there must be spun out long harangues of common-place morality. Few or none but those who are critically conversant with controversies of this kind, observe infringements of time and place; but all are offended with a want of probability in the management of the plot. I have made these observations, as Shakspeare is more remarkable for adhering to unity of action than to the other two: the one is the offspring of genius alone, the other of art.[d]

W. N.*

[d] These observations on the unities of time and place are correctly and powerfully given; and when added to the remarks which have been previously quoted in a former note from Dr. Gregory, cannot but convince the reader how judiciously, and with what happy effect, Shakspeare has liberated himself from an arbitrary and overwhelming yoke.

* Anderson's Bee, Vol. 1, p. 56, et seq.

No. VII.

CRITICAL REMARKS ON OTHELLO CONTINUED.

SHAKSPEARE has adorned the hero of this tragedy with every virtue that can render human nature great and amiable, and he has brought him into such trying situations as give full proof of both. His love for Desdemona is of the most refined and exalted kind; and his behaviour, upon the supposition of his false return, is an indication of his great spirit, and such as might be expected from his keen sense of honour and warlike character: though naturally susceptible of the tenderest passions, yet being engaged from his early youth in scenes that required the exercise of those of a higher nature, he has not learned

> ——— Those soft parts of conversation
> That chamberers have.
> —— Rude (says he) am I in speech,
> And little bless'd with the set phrase of peace.

His manners have nothing of that studied courtesy which is the consequence of polite conversation, a tincture of which is delicately spread over the behaviour of Ludovico and Gratiano; but all is the natural effusion of gentleness and magnanimity. His generous and soaring mind, always occupied with ideas natural to itself, could not

brook, according to his own expression, *to study all the qualities of human dealings*, the artifices of interest, and the meanness of servile attentions. To a man 'constituted' like Iago himself, the affected interest which he takes in the welfare of his master, profound as it was, must have been very suspicious; but to Othello it is the effect of *exceeding honesty!* His enlarged affections were used to diffuse happiness in a wide circle, to be pained with misery, and displeased with injustice, if within his view; but he did not consider the small proportion of mankind that was inspired by similar sentiments, and therefore the parade of Iago was in his eyes unbounded generosity.

With so much nature and dignity does he always act, that, even when distorted with angry passions, he appears amiable.

> EMIL. I would you had never seen him.
> DESD. So would not I; my love doth so approve him,
> That even his stubbornness, his checks, and frowns,
> Have grace and favour in them.

A character of this kind commands respect; and in his actions we naturally interest ourselves.

Iago, who is the prime mover of the events of this tragedy, is a character of no simple kind: he possesses uncommon sagacity in judging of the actions of men good and bad; he discerns the merit of Cassio to lie more in the theory than in the practice of war. Roderigo he comprehended completely; the amiable nature of Desdemona he

was not ignorant of; he often praises the free and noble nature of Othello; the beauty of Cassio's life he felt with much regret; and he is sensible of the intrinsic value of virtue, as well as its estimation among men; he knew well that, without virtue, no solid or lasting reputation could be acquired; and without doubt he understood the force of Cassio's feeling reflections on this subject, though he makes an appearance of despising them. Iago, it must be observed, artfully assumes the character rather of strong than of high and refined benevolence: in the second scene of the first act he says,

> With the little godliness I have,
> I did full hard forbear him.

—a character which he knew would be more easily supported, which would render him less liable of being supposed acting from pride, and consequently create no envy. Content for the present with the humble appellation of *honest creature*, he found sufficient amends in the prospect of being recompensed with double interest in the accomplishment of his plans.

In his first interview with Othello, Iago begins his deep schemes very successfully, by labouring, with bold and masterly cunning, to impress him with a strong sense of his fidelity and attachment to his interests; he represents himself as sustaining a difficult conflict between two of the best principles, regard to his master, and a fear of seeming to act with a malicious cruelty. He speaks like a

person fired with anger that he cannot contain; he does not give a detail of Brabantio's proceedings like an unconcerned spectator, but in that confused and interrupted manner worthy of the truest passion; his reflections, which, according to calm reason, ought to come last, according to passion come first. The scene which occasioned his passion is over; he then resolves in his thoughts the nature of it; and lastly, the part which he ought to have acted takes possession of his mind. In this last state he finds himself when he meets Othello, perplexed in deliberating whether he ought in conscience to do contrived murder. Having disburdened himself of this, the subject opens in his mind; he goes backward, and describes what were his sensations in a very striking manner:—

> ——————Nine or ten times
> I thought to have jerked him under the ribs.

The fumes of passion are now supposed to be dissipating; and the cause of his anger and reflections he unfolds more clearly, but in the same enraged and animated strain:

> ——————Nay, but he prated,
> And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms
> Against your honour,
> That with the little godliness I have,
> I did full hard forbear him.

Having fully vented himself, he begins now coolly to urge some prudential arguments with regard to Othello's conduct in this critical affair:

——————But I pray, Sir,
Are you fast married? For be sure of this,
That the Magnifico is much belov'd,
And hath in his effect a voice potential,
As double as the Duke's; he will divorce you,
Or put upon you what restraint or grievance
The law, (with all his might to inforce it on,)
Will give him cable.

Having managed his part in the succeeding transactions of this scene with the same kind of propriety, the busy rascal makes haste to act in a very different character with Roderigo.

Hitherto Iago seems not to have formed any determined plan of action. A bait is laid for him in the simplicity of Roderigo, and how to get possession of his treasures seems to be the only object he had at first in view. He informs him that, having received many injuries from the Moor, he has reason to concur in schemes against him; and in order to amuse Roderigo, to bring matters into some ferment, and at the same time to have an opportunity of showing his zeal to Othello, he advises him, as the most likely means to obtain Desdemona, to inflame her father by giving him an account of her marriage with the Moor; though Iago himself, it is probable, expected no success from this device. However, while his orders are executing, he has leisure to consider what he is about; for Iago, at his first setting out, seems to have no intention of dipping so deep in wickedness as 'to bring about' the dreadful event 'which closes this tragedy.' Finding no method to gratify

Roderigo, he dexterously makes him a tool for promoting his own interests. The suit of Roderigo, and the active hand he had taken in it, had brought him to think of a scheme of which the same persons were to be the subject. To render Cassio odious to Othello by scandalous aspersions, and by these means to be preferred in his place, are the objects which he now has in view; a pursuit which he did not perhaps think would be attended with such a fatal train of consequences, though his sagacious mind discerns something that strikes him with horror.

> ——————— Hell and night
> Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

Shakspeare has shown great judgment in the darkness which he makes to prevail in the first counsels of Iago. To the poet himself, all the succeeding events must have been clear and determined; but to bring himself again into the situation of one who sees them in embryo, to draw a mist over that which he had already cleared, must have required an exertion of genius peculiar to this author alone. In so lively a manner does he make Iago show his perplexity about the future management of his conduct, that one is almost tempted to think that the poet had determined as little himself about some of the particulars of Iago's destruction. When with much reasoning about their propriety, he is by himself digesting his schemes, he says,

——————— 'Tis here—but yet confused;
Knavery's plain face is never seen till used.

But, however much at a loss he may be about the method of accomplishing his designs, yet for the present he lets slip no opportunity that will promote them. He lays his foundation sure, as knowing what a hazardous structure he had to rear upon it. He had already laboured to exhibit himself in the best light to the unsuspicious Moor, and he succeeded to the height of his wishes; for we find him congratulating himself upon the advantages that will accrue from it:

——————— He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work upon him.

Upon the same principles does he go on working the downfal of Cassio: his blameless and well-established character must be first tarnished; he must be known capable of irregularity before the crime he is accused of obtain full belief; and this more difficult part of his undertaking the indefatigable Iago finds means to accomplish, and with such ability as to promote at the same time the opinion of his own honesty and goodness. One would have imagined that he would have remained content with all the lucky events of the tumultuous adventure on the platform, and exult; but he cautiously determines not to triumph before he has gained a complete victory: his thoughtful and piercing mind sees another use to which the disgrace of Cassio may be applied. Under a cover

of zeal to serve him, he advises the virtuous man to a scheme that will further work his ruin; and by hinting to him the great power which Desdemona had over her husband, he opens a very likely method for regaining his favour through her mediation. The bait is swallowed, and an appearance of intimacy, most favourable to his design, is thereby produced.

The deliberate villain now began to think that he had paved the way sufficiently for communicating the important secret; but as he had to do with a man whose 'nature's pledge' was not like his, 'to spy into abuse,' he still acts with extreme caution. Othello had indulged a high notion of the honour of Cassio, and the virtue of Desdemona; and it was not by a suspicious appearance, or a slight argument, that his opinions were to be changed. Iago was sensible of all these difficulties, and he encounters them with much ability. He assumes the appearance of one whose mind laboured with the knowledge of some flagrant impropriety, which he could not contain; and when any circumstance recals the abhorred idea, an involuntary remark escapes, and immediately he affects to recover himself. He kindles the jealousy of Othello by tantalizing him with imperfect accounts and ambiguous arguments; he agitates and distracts his soul by confusedly opening one source of suspicion, and leaving him in the perplexity of doubt; then immediately by displaying the matter in another point of view, gives him a

farther glimmering into the affair; until at last, frantic with rage and jealousy, Othello insists upon satisfactory information; and by these means, the discoveries which he makes are made to appear more the effect of necessity than inclination.

Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore.

Incomplete knowledge of what concerns us deeply, besides the tortures of suspense into which it throws the mind, has a natural effect to make it appear in the most hideous colours which it is possible to devise. Alarmed with a thousand phantoms, the affrighted imagination is at a loss what to decide, or where to rest; racked with many contending arguments, agitated with the anxiety of hope and fear, and impatient to be relieved from this internal war, it flies into whatever asylum it can find; and solicitous about the danger, it generally choses the worst.

Upon the whole, in this intercourse betwixt Iago and Othello, Shakspeare has shown the most complete knowledge of the human heart. Here he has put forth all the strength of his genius; the faults which he is so prone to fall into are entirely out of sight. We find none of his quibbling, his punning, or bombast; all is seriousness, all is passion. He brings human nature into the most difficult situation that can be conceived, and with matchless skill he supports it. Who can read those admirable scenes without being touched in the most sensible manner for the high grief of

Othello? Plunged into a sea of troubles which he did not deserve, we see him torn asunder in the most cruel manner. How feeling are his reflections on his own state of mind!

——— Perdition catch my soul
If I do not love thee; and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.
———I'd rather be a toad,
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,
Than keep a corner in the thing I love,
For others' use.
———Oh now, for ever
Farewel the tranquil mind, farewel content.

And afterwards:

Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction; had he rain'd
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,
Given to captivity me and my hopes;
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience. But, alas! to make me
A fixed figure for the hand of scorn
To point his slow and moving finger at—
Yet could I bear that too, well, very well.
But there, where I have garner'd up my heart;
Where either I must live, or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs,
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence,
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
To knot and gender in: Turn thy complection there,
Patience, thou young and rose-lipt cherubim;
Ay, there look grim as hell.

After sustaining a violent conflict betwixt love

and revenge, his high spirit finally resolves into the latter.[f]

W. N.[g]

[f] Bishop Lowth, speaking of Othello, judiciously observes, "that the passion of jealousy, its causes, circumstances, progress, and effects, are more accurately, more copiously, more satisfactorily described in one drama of Shakspeare than in all the disputations of philosophy.

[g] Anderson's Bee, Vol. i, pp. 87 ad 90, p. 132 ad 136.

No. VIII.

CRITICAL REMARKS ON OTHELLO CONCLUDED.

It has been observed of Shakspeare that he has not often exhibited the delicacy of female character, and this has been sufficiently apologized for, from the uncivilized age in which he lived; and women never appearing upon the stage in his time, might have made him less studious in this department of the drama. Indeed, when we consider his strength of mind, his imagination, which delighted in whatever was bold and daring, we should almost think it impossible that he could enter into all the softness and refinement of love. But in spite of all these disadvantages, he has shown that, in whatever view he chose to behold human nature, he could perform it superior to any other; for nowhere in the writings of Shakspeare, or any where else, have we found the female character drawn with so much tenderness and beauty as in that of Desdemona. The gentleness with which she behaves to all with whom she converses, the purity, the modesty, the warmth of her love, her resignation in the deepest distress, together with her personal accomplishments, attract our highest regard; but that which chiefly distinguishes her, is that ex-

quisite sensibility of imagination which interested her so much in the dangers of Othello's youthful adventures; a passion natural enough indeed, though it is not every one who is capable of experiencing it. Othello, as we have seen, was naturally of an heroic and amiable disposition; but when by his bold undertakings he is exposed to imminent dangers, he would then shine in his brightest colours: all his magnanimity and all his address are brought to view; at that moment all the generous affections of the soul would be drawn towards him,—admiration of his virtues, wishes for his success, and solicitude for his safety. And when the best feelings of the heart are thus lavished on a certain object, it is no wonder it should settle into fixed love and esteem.

Such was the sublimated passion of Desdemona, inspired solely by internal beauty. The person of Othello had every thing to cool desire: possessing not only the black complexion and the swarthy features of the African, he was also declined, as he says, into the vale of years. But his mind was every thing to Desdemona; it supplied the place of youth by its ardour, and of every personal accomplishment by its strength, its elevation, and softness. Where, in all the annals of love, do we find so pure and so disinterested a passion, supported with so much dignity and nature? She loved him *for the dangers he had passed;* upon this fleeting and incorporeal idea did she rest her affections, upon abstract feelings and qualities of the mind, which

must require in her all that warmth of imagination, and liveliness of conception, which distinguish the finest genius.

The character of this exquisite lady is always consistently supported. Her behaviour towards Cassio shows, in a particular manner, her liberal and benevolent heart; and her conversation with Emilia about the heinousness of infidelity is a striking picture of innocent purity: it is artfully introduced, and adds much to the pathos of the tragedy. The circumstances of ordering her wedding sheets to be put on her bed, and the melancholy song of a willow, are well imagined, and waken the mind to expect some dreadful revolution. Indeed, throughout the whole scene before her death an awful solemnity reigns. The mind of Desdemona seems to be in a most agitated condition: she starts an observation about Lodovico, and immediately falls into her gloomy thoughts, paying no attention to the answer of Emilia, though connected with an anecdote that would have at another time raised her curiosity. This absence of mind shows beyond the power of language her afflicted and tortured state. But what gives a finishing stroke to the terror of this midnight scene, is the rustling of the wind, which the affrighted imagination of Desdemona supposes to be one knocking at the door. This circumstance, which would have been overlooked as trifling by an inferior writer, has a most sublime effect in the hands of Shakspeare; and till the fatal catastrophe,

the same horribly interesting sensations are kept up. Othello enters her bedchamber with a sword and candle, in that perturbation and distraction of mind which marked his behaviour since the supposed discovery of her guilt, remains of tenderness still struggling with revenge in his bosom; and a conversation is protracted, during which the mind is arrested in a state of the most dreadful suspense that can well be imagined.

Had Othello been actuated by cruelty alone in this action; had he, to gratify a savage nature, put Desdemona to death, the scene would have been shocking, and we should have turned from it with aversion. But instigated as he is by the noble principles of honour and justice, and weighing at the same time the reluctance with which he performs it, and the great sacrifice which he makes to his finest feelings, it on these accounts produces those mournfully pleasing sensations, which to attain is the highest praise of the tragic poet.

In the final unravelling of the plot, there is often great difficulty; it is the grand point to which the author aims in the course of successive scenes, and upon the proper execution of it depends much of the merit of the work. Here Shakspeare has not fallen off. The same high tone of passion is preserved. Upon the discovery of Desdemona's innocence, and the intrigues of Iago, all the characters act a very consistent and natural part. Othello's distraction is painted in an inimitable manner. Unwilling to believe that he had acted

upon false grounds, and confounded with contrary evidence, he knows not where to betake himself. After uttering a few incoherent speeches, which show in the strongest light a mind rent with grief and remorse, he gradually recovers himself; and resuming, as much as possible, his natural composure and firmness, he looks around him a little, and deliberately views his wretched situation; but finding no peace for him on earth, he terminates his existence.[h]

Iago also stands forth in the group a just monument of his own crimes. Seeing the proof too plain against him, he can brave it out no longer. He sees no prospect of escape from any quarter; his own arts are now of no avail; and he knows that he deserves no pity: he gives up all for lost, and resolves upon a state of dumb desperation, most expressive of the horror of his mind. In this state, we have the satisfaction to see him dragged to deserved punishment.[i]

[h] "No eloquence," remarks Schlegel, "is capable of painting the overwhelming force of the catastrophe in *Othello*, the pressure of feelings which measure out in a moment the abysses of eternity."—Lectures on Dramatic Literature, vol. ii. p. 192.

[i] "Iago," as I have elsewhere observed, "the most cool and malignant villain which the annals of iniquity have ever recorded, would, from the detestation which accompanies his every action, be utterly insupportable in the representation, were it not for the talents, for the skill and knowledge in the springs and principles of human thought and feeling, which he constantly displays, and which, fortunately for the moral of the

It might now be expected that we should proceed to the ungrateful task of pointing out what a critic would blame in this tragedy. I have already observed that it is perhaps the most sublime and finished of Shakspeare's compositions; yet, were I to point out all its redundancies, puns, conceits, and other faults, which are commonly taken notice of in this author, I might fill some pages. Such a detail, however, would be trivial and impertinent. No person, who can relish its beauties, will be much offended with any thing of this kind in the course of perusing Othello. Its excellences are so bold and so striking, as to make the blemishes almost wholly vanish in the midst of their splendour. In a rude age, it is indeed even the mark of a rich and luxuriant mind to abound in faults, in the same manner that a strong and fertile soil produces most weeds:

> What are the lays of artful Addison,
> Coldly correct, to Shakspeare's warblings wild!

It is with much regret, however, we must observe that, after Shakspeare had supported, with

scene, while they excite and keep alive an eager interest and curiosity, shield him not from our abhorrence and condemnation."

And, in reference to the lights and shades which so admirably diversify this striking drama, I immediately afterwards remark, "Amid this whirlwind and commotion of hatred and revenge, the modest, the artless, the unsuspicious Desdemona, seems, in the soothing but transient influence which she exerts, like an evening star, that beams lovely, for a moment, on the dark heavings of the tempest, and then is lost for ever!"—Shakspeare and his Times, vol. ii. p. 531.

uniform propriety, one of the most difficult characters genius ever attempted, he should at last fall off, and put a trifling conceit in the mouth of the dying man:

> Oth. I kiss'd thee e'er I kill'd thee—no way but this,
> Killing myself to die upon a kiss.

It might also be objected to the contrivance of the plot, that Iago had not sufficient motives for the perpetration of so many horrid crimes; and this the sagacity of Shakspeare has foreseen, and with much address obviated. In the course of our observations, we have already noticed that he does not suppose Iago, in his first setting out, resolutely to plan the destruction of Desdemona and Cassio. The objects he had in view were to get possession of the wealth of Roderigo, and to be preferred in the place of Cassio; but seeing matters beginning to be embroiled around him, the firm and undaunted Iago will not stop short, whatever should be the consequence. By thus viewing his conduct, it will appear natural and probable. He wishes (as human nature ever must) to view himself even for a moment in the light of an honest man:—

> And what's he then that says I play the villain, &c.
> Act. 2. Sc. iv.

But the principal fault which we observe in this performance, is a want of consistency in supporting the upright and disinterested character Emilia. We can easily suppose, in the first place, that she might procure Desdemona's napkin for

her husband without seeming to concur with him, or even suspect his schemes; but when afterwards, in the tenth scene of the third act, she sees the improper use to which the napkin is applied, and the great distress which the loss of it occasioned to Desdemona, without so much as wishing to explain the misunderstanding, she is no more the open and virtuous Emilia, but a coadjutor with her dark and unfeeling husband. This is a remarkable violation of every appearance of probability, when we contrast it with her noble and spirited conduct afterwards. We are surprised to find a slip of so much magnitude from the clear and piercing judgment of Shakspeare, especially when we consider that it would have been very easily remedied by removing her during this interview.[j]

W. N.[k]

[j] If we consider Shakspeare, as I am persuaded we must do, not intending to represent Emilia as by any means a perfectly correct character, this seeming inconsistency will immediately vanish. Of this opinion is Schlegel, who says: "to give still greater effect to the angelic purity of Desdemona, Shakspeare has, in Emilia, associated with her a companion of doubtful virtue. From the sinful levity of this woman, it is also conceivable that she should not confess the abstraction of the handkerchief, when Othello violently demands it back: this would, otherwise, be the circumstance in the whole piece the most difficult to justify."—Lectures on Dramatic Literature, vol. ii. p. 192.

[k] Anderson's Bee, vol. i. p. 176 ad p. 181.

No. IX.

CRITICISM ON THE CHARACTER AND TRAGEDY OF HAMLET.

Criticism, like every thing else, is subject to the prejudices of our education or of our country. National prejudice, indeed, is, of all deviations from justice, the most common and the most allowable; it is a near, though perhaps an illegitimate, relation of that patriotism which has been ranked among the first virtues of characters the most eminent and illustrious. To authors, however, of a rank so elevated as to aspire to universal fame, the partiality of their countrymen has been sometimes prejudicial; in proportion as they have unreasonably applauded, the critics of other countries, from a very common sort of feeling, have unreasonably censured; and there are few great writers, whom prejudice on either side may not, from a partial view of their works, find some ground for estimating at a rate much above or much below the standard of justice.

No author, perhaps, ever existed, of whom opinion has been so various as *Shakspeare*. Endowed with all the sublimity, and subject to all the irregularities of genius, his advocates have room for unbounded praise, and their opponents

for frequent blame. His departure from all the common rules which criticism, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, has imposed, leaves no legal code by which the decision can be regulated; and in the feelings of different readers, the same passage may appear simple or mean, natural or preposterous, may excite admiration, or create disgust.

But it is not, I apprehend, from particular passages or incidents that Shakspeare is to be judged. Though his admirers frequently contend for beauty in the most distorted of the former, and probability in the most unaccountable of the latter; yet it must be owned that in both there are often gross defects which criticism cannot justify, though the situation of the poet, and the time in which he wrote, may easily excuse. But we are to look for the superiority of Shakspeare in the astonishing and almost supernatural powers of his invention, his absolute command over the passions, and his wonderful knowledge of nature. Of the structure of his stories, or the probability of his incidents, he is frequently careless,—these he took at random from the legendary tale, or the extravagant romance; but his intimate acquaintance with the human mind seldom or never forsakes him; and amidst the most fantastic and improbable situations, the persons of his drama speak in the language of the heart, and in the style of their characters.

Of all the characters of Shakspeare, that of Hamlet has been generally thought the mor

difficult to be reduced to any fixed or settled principle. With the strongest purposes of revenge, he is irresolute and inactive; amidst the gloom of the deepest melancholy, he is gay and jocular; and while he is described as a passionate lover, he seems indifferent about the object of his affections. It may be worth while to inquire whether any leading idea can be found, upon which these apparent contradictions may be reconciled, and a character so pleasing in the closet, and so much applauded on the stage, rendered as unambiguous in the general as it is striking in detail. I will venture to lay before my readers some observations on this subject, though with the diffidence due to a question of which the public has doubted, and much abler critics have already written.

The basis of Hamlet's character seems to be an extreme sensibility of mind, apt to be strongly impressed by its situation, and overpowered by the feelings which that situation excites. Naturally of the most virtuous and most amiable dispositions, the circumstances in which he was placed unhinged those principles of action, which, in another situation, would have delighted mankind, and made himself happy. That kind of distress which he suffered was, beyond all others, calculated to produce this effect. His misfortunes were not the misfortunes of accident, which, though they may overwhelm at first, the mind will soon call up reflections to alleviate, and hopes to cheer: they were such as reflection only serves

to irritate, such as rankle in the soul's tenderest part, her sense of virtue, and feelings of natural affection; they arose from an uncle's villainy, a mother's guilt, a father's murder!—Yet amidst the gloom of melancholy, and the agitation of passion, in which his calamities involve him, there are occasional breakings-out of a mind richly endowed by nature, and cultivated by education. We perceive gentleness in his demeanour, wit in his conversation, taste in his amusements, and wisdom in his reflections.

That Hamlet's character, thus formed by nature, and thus modelled by situation, is often variable and uncertain, I am not disposed to deny. I will content myself with the supposition that this is the very character which Shakspeare meant to allot him. Finding such a character in real life, of a person endowed with feelings so delicate as to border on weakness, with sensibility too exquisite to allow of determined action, he has placed it where it could be best exhibited, in scenes of wonder, of terror, and of indignation, where its varying emotions might be most strongly marked amidst the workings of imagination, and the war of the passions.

This is the very management of the character by which, above all others, we could be interested in its behalf. Had Shakspeare made Hamlet pursue his vengeance with a steady determined purpose, had he led him through difficulties arising from accidental causes, and not from the doubts

and hesitation of his own mind, the anxiety of the spectator might have been highly raised; but it would have been anxiety for the event, not for the person. As it is, we feel not only the virtues, but the weaknesses of Hamlet, as our own; we see a man who, in other circumstances, would have exercised all the moral and social virtues, one whom nature had formed to be

> Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
> Th' observ'd of all observers,

placed in a situation in which even the amiable qualities of his mind serve but to aggravate his distress, and to perplex his conduct. Our compassion for the first, and our anxiety for the latter, are excited in the strongest manner; and hence arises that indescribable charm in Hamlet, which attracts every reader and every spectator, which the more perfect characters of other tragedies never dispose us to feel.

The Orestes of the Greek poet, who, at his first appearance, lays down a plan of vengeance which he resolutely pursues, interests us for the accomplishment of his purpose; but of him we think only as the instrument of that justice which we wish to overtake the murderers of Agamemnon. We feel with Orestes, (or rather with Sophocles, for in such passages we always hear the poet in his hero,) that 'it is fit that such gross infringements of the moral law should be punished with death,

in order to render wickedness less frequent;' but when Horatio exclaims on the death of his friend,

Now crack'd a noble heart!

we forget the murder of the king, the villainy of Claudius, the guilt of Gertrude; our recollection dwells only on the memory of that 'sweet prince,' the delicacy of whose feelings a milder planet should have ruled, whose gentle virtues should have bloomed through a life of felicity and usefulness.

Hamlet, from the very opening of the piece, is delineated as one under the dominion of melancholy, whose spirits were overborne by his feelings. Grief for his father's death, and displeasure at his mother's marriage, prey on his mind; and he seems, with the weakness natural to such a disposition, to yield to their controul. He does not attempt to resist or combat these impressions, but is willing to fly from the contest, though it were into the grave.

Oh! that this too too solid flesh would melt, &c.

Even after his father's ghost has informed him of his murder, and commissioned him to avenge it, we find him complaining of that situation in which his fate had placed him:

The time is out of joint; oh! cursed spight,
That ever I was born to set it right!

And afterwards, in the perplexity of his condition, meditating on the expediency of suicide:

To be, or not to be, that is the question.

The account he gives of his own feelings to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which is evidently spoken in earnest, though somewhat covered with the mist of his affected distraction, is exactly descriptive of a mind full of that weariness of life which is characteristic of low spirits: 'This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory,' &c. And, indeed, he expressly delineates his own character as of the kind above-mentioned, when, hesitating on the evidence of his uncle's villainy, he says,

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be the devil, and the devil hath power
> T' assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
> *Out of my weakness and my melancholy,*
> Abuses me to damn me.

This doubt of the grounds on which our purpose is founded, is as often the effect as the cause of irresolution, which first hesitates, and then seeks out an excuse for its hesitation.

It may, perhaps, be doing Shakspeare no injustice to suppose that he sometimes began a play without having fixed in his mind, in any determined manner, the plan or conduct of his piece. The character of some principal person of the drama might strike his imagination strongly in the opening scenes; as he went on, this character

would continue to impress itself on the conduct as well as the discourse of that person, and, it is possible, might affect the situations and incidents, especially in those romantic or legendary subjects, where history did not confine him to certain unchangeable events. In the story of Amleth, the son of Horwondil, told by Saxo-Grammaticus, from which the tragedy of Hamlet is taken, the young prince, who is to revenge the death of his father, murdered by his uncle Fengo, counterfeits madness, that he may be allowed to remain about the court in safety and without suspicion. He never forgets his purposed vengeance, and acts with much more cunning towards its accomplishment than the Hamlet of Shakspeare. But Shakspeare, wishing to elevate the hero of his tragedy, and at the same time to interest the audience in his behalf, throws around him, from the beginning, the majesty of melancholy, along with that sort of weakness and irresolution which frequently attends it. The incident of the Ghost, which is entirely the poet's own, and not to be found in the Danish legend, not only produces the happiest stage effect, but is also of the greatest advantage in unfolding that character which is stamped on the young prince at the opening of the play. In the communications of such a visionary being, there is an uncertain kind of belief, and a dark unlimited horror, which are aptly suited to display the wavering purpose and varied emotions of a mind endowed with a delicacy of feeling that often shakes its

fortitude, with sensibility that overpowers its strength.[1]

MACKENZIE.[m]

[1] The following observations on the conduct of Hamlet, taken from the lectures on Shakspeare lately delivered at Hamburgh by Mr. George Egestorf, and inserted in the Literary Gazette, appear to me to exhibit uncommon acuteness and profundity of remark, both with regard to Hamlet, and to the object of the poet in the delineation of this remarkable character.

"Singular it is," he observes, "that so many theories should have been formed respecting the personal character of Hamlet, and that all should fall so far short of it, as drawn by Shakspeare himself, and as the poet has put it into his own mouth in the well-known monologue,

To be, or not to be, &c.

a monologue, in which all is comprised that can make a man exclaim,

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

and, at the same time, every consideration summed up that 'must give us pause,' &c.

"In this state of mind, he is too much disgusted with every thing, that the assumed air of kindness in the usurper should be able to make any impression upon him. He is shocked at the evident want of discretion, and at the inconstancy of his mother:—

Why she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet within a month, &c.

And—

Frailty, thy name is woman!

"After the discovery has been made by the Ghost, and he is convinced of the licentiousness and infidelity of his parent, he exclaims,

O most pernicious woman!

This makes him so doubtful respecting conjugal faith, that his gloomy state of mind even casts a dark shade on the object of his affection—the amiable Ophelia; a shade which is not dispelled until it is too late. That he did not merely feign an attachment to Ophelia, but really loved her, is evident from his conduct at her grave, which, indeed, reminds us of the beautiful lines of Goldsmith:—

To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom, is—to die.

"It is worthy of remark that the poet does not once bring Ophelia into the presence of Hamlet during her alienation of mind: had Hamlet seen her thus, and had he still remained unmoved by her calamity, of which he must have known his conduct to have been the cause, his want of feeling would have amounted to unnatural hardness of heart, and necessarily have lessened him in our esteem, or have even made us despise and hate him. The harshness of his conversation with her must likewise be ascribed to the state of mind he was in when he encountered her,—immediately after that energetic and important monologue. Subsequently to this, as, for instance, at the representation of the play, his colloquy with her is much more qualified and less severe, though still ironical and sarcastic.

"It is, however, Hamlet's irresolution, his want of firmness, his constantly wavering between a resolve and its execution, his poring and sceptic disposition, as displayed in the above-cited monologue, that the poet intended to display in the personal character of his hero; the danger of a want of stability, which Shakspeare points out to us, a state of mind that is indeed inimical to happiness, and that renders us inadequate to the discharge of the duties of our station in life. Hamlet is not a character of exemplary virtue, and was not designed by the poet to be such; he is, however, perfectly a dramatical character, and engages our attention from the commencement to the conclusion of the representation, which could not be the case if he were a character unfit for representation on the stage. Those who, notwithstanding this, would fain dispute

the point, would do well to examine the character of Achilles, and then tell us whether the choler and obstinate desire of vengeance in Achilles, so pernicious in their effects, and which brought a thousand ills on the Grecian camp,—whether these be characteristics of a hero who may be pointed out as being virtuous? and whether we are thence to conclude that Homer, the father of poets, made an injudicious choice in the subject of his epopée? The unbounded pride of Achilles, his disobedience to his general, his cruelty to his dead enemy, and his selling the body of his son to old Priam,—all these we abhor while we read them; and the poet only shows them, as Dryden justly observes, not to be imitated, but like rocks and quicksands, to be carefully avoided and shunned. Thus Shakspeare has set up the character of Hamlet, like some pharos or beacon-light, at the bickering flame of which we are not to kindle the torch which is to light us on our way, but of which we are to steer clear on the ocean of our lives."—Literary Gazette, October 13, 1827.

* The Mirror, No. 99, April 18, 1780.

No. X.

CRITICISM ON THE CHARACTER AND TRAGEDY OF HAMLET CONCLUDED.

THE view of Hamlet's character exhibited in the last number, may, perhaps, serve to explain a difficulty which has always occurred both to the reader and the spectator, on perceiving his madness, at one time, put on the appearance, not of fiction, but of reality; a difficulty by which some have been induced to suppose the distraction of the prince a strange unaccountable mixture throughout of real insanity and counterfeit disorder.

The distraction of Hamlet, however, is clearly affected through the whole play, always subject to the controul of his reason, and subservient to the accomplishment of his designs. At the grave of Ophelia, indeed, it exhibits some temporary marks of a real disorder. His mind, subject from nature to all the weakness of sensibility, agitated by the incidental misfortune of Ophelia's death, amidst the dark and permanent impression of his revenge, is thrown for a while off its poise, and, in the paroxysm of the moment, breaks forth into that extravagant rhapsody which he utters to Laertes.

Counterfeited madness, in a person of the cha-

racter I have ascribed to Hamlet, could not be so uniformly kept up, as not to allow the reigning impressions of his mind to show themselves in the midst of his affected extravagance. It turned chiefly on his love to Ophelia, which he meant to hold forth as its great subject; but it frequently glanced on the wickedness of his uncle, his knowledge of which it was certainly his business to conceal.

In two of Shakspeare's tragedies are introduced, at the same time, instances of counterfeit madness and of real distraction. In both plays the same distinction is observed, and the false discriminated from the true by similar appearances. Lear's imagination constantly runs on the ingratitude of his daughters, and the resignation of his crown; and Ophelia, after she has wasted the first ebullience of her distraction in some wild and incoherent sentences, fixes on the death of her father for the subject of her song:

> They bore him bare-fac'd on the bier.—
> And will he not come again?
> And will he not come again? &c.

But Edgar puts on a semblance as opposite as may be to his real situation and his ruling thoughts. He never ventures on any expression bordering on the subjects of a father's cruelty, or a son's misfortune. Hamlet, in the same manner, were he as firm in mind as Edgar, would never hint any thing in his affected disorder that might lead to a

suspicion of his having discovered the villainy of his uncle; but his feeling, too powerful for his prudence, often breaks through that disguise which it seems to have been his original, and ought to have continued his invariable purpose to maintain, till an opportunity should present itself of accomplishing the revenge which he meditated.

Of the reality of Hamlet's love, doubts have also been suggested. But if that delicacy of feeling, approaching to weakness, for which I contend, be allowed him, the affected abuse, which he suffers at last to grow into scurrility, of his mistress, will, I think, be found not inconsistent with the truth of his affection for her. Feeling its real force, and beginning to play the madman on that ground, he would naturally go as far from the reality as possible. Had he not loved her at all, or slightly loved her, he might have kept up some appearance of passion amidst his feigned insanity; but really loving her, he would have been hurt by such a resemblance in the counterfeit. We can bear a downright caricature of our friend much easier than an unfavourable likeness.

It must be allowed, however, that the momentous scenes in which he is afterwards engaged, seem to have smothered, if not extinguished, the feelings of his love. His total forgetfulness of Ophelia so soon after her death cannot easily be justified. It is vain, indeed, to attempt justifying Shakspeare in such particulars. "Time," says Dr. Johnson, "toil'd after him in vain." He

seems often to forget its rights, as well in the progress of the passions, as in the business of the stage. That change of feeling and of resolution which time only can effect, he brings forth within the limits of a single scene. Whether love is to be excited, or resentment allayed, guilt to be made penitent, or sorrow cheerful, the effect is frequently produced in a space hardly sufficient for words to express it.

It has been remarked that our great poet was not so happy in the delineation of love as of the other passions. Were it not treason against the majesty of Shakspeare, one might observe that, though he looked with a sort of instinctive perception into the recesses of nature, yet it was impossible for him to possess a knowledge of the refinements of delicacy, or to catch in his pictures the nicer shades of polished manners; and, without this knowledge, love can seldom be introduced on the stage but with a degree of coarseness which will offend an audience of good taste. This observation is not meant to extend to Shakspeare's tragic scenes: in situations of deep distress or violent emotion, the *manners* are lost in the *passions;* but if we examine his lovers in the lighter scenes of ordinary life, we shall generally find them trespassing against the rules of decorum, and the feelings of delicacy.[a]

[a] Assuredly not against the rules of decorum and the feelings of delicacy of *the age in which the poet lived;* for it may, I think, on sufficient authority be asserted that the lighter

That gaiety and playfulness of deportment and of conversation which Hamlet sometimes not only assumes, but seems actually disposed to, is, I apprehend, no contradiction to the general tone of melancholy in his character. That sort of melancholy which is the most genuine as well as the most amiable of any, neither arising from natural sourness of temper, nor prompted by accidental chagrin, but the effect of delicate sensibility, impressed with a sense of sorrow, or a feeling of its own weakness, will, I believe, often be found indulging itself in a sportfulness of external behaviour, amidst the pressure of a sad, or even the anguish of a broken heart.° Slighter emotions affect our ordinary discourse; but deep distress,

love-scenes of Shakspeare are often more chaste and delicate than even much of the correspondence on amatory subjects of the higher classes of the Elizabethan era.

° "He who is acquainted with the workings of the human heart," as I have remarked elsewhere, "will be far, very far indeed, from considering this as any deviation from the truth of nature. Melancholy, when not the offspring of an ill-spent life, or of an habitual bad temper, but the consequence of mere casualties and misfortunes, or of the vices and passions of others, operating on feelings too gentle, delicate, and susceptible, to bear up against the ruder evils of existence, will sometimes spring with playful elasticity from the pressure of the heaviest burden, and dissipating, for a moment, the anguish of a breaking heart, will, like a sun-beam in a winter's day, illumine all around it with a bright but transient ray, with the sallies of humorous wit, and even with the hilarity of sportive simplicity; an interchange which serves but to render the returning storm more deep and gloomy."—Shakspeare and his Times, vol. ii. p. 396.

sitting in the secret gloom of the soul, casts not its regard on the common occurrences of life, but suffers them to trick themselves out in the usual garb of indifference or of gaiety, according to the fashion of the society around it, or the situation in which they chance to arise. The melancholy man feels in himself (if I may be allowed the expression) a sort of double person; one which, covered with the darkness of its imagination, looks not forth into the world, nor takes any concern in vulgar objects or frivolous pursuits; another, which he lends, as it were, to ordinary men, which can accommodate itself to their tempers and manners, and indulge, without feeling any degradation from the indulgence, a smile with the cheerful, and a laugh with the giddy.

The conversation of Hamlet with the Gravedigger seems to me to be perfectly accounted for under this supposition; and, instead of feeling it counteract the tragic effect of the story, I never see him in that scene without receiving, from his transient jests with the clown before him, an idea of the deepest melancholy being rooted at his heart. The light point of view in which he places serious and important things, marks the power of that great impression which swallows up every thing else in his mind, which makes Cæsar and Alexander so indifferent to him, that he can trace their remains in the plaster of a cottage, or the stopper of a beer-barrel. It is from the same turn of mind, which, from the elevation of its sorrow, looks down

on the bustle of ambition, and the pride of fame, that he breaks forth into the reflection, in the fourth act, on the expedition of Fortinbras.

It is with regret as well as deference that I accuse the judgment of Mr. Garrick, or the taste of his audience; but I cannot help thinking that the exclusion of the scene of the Grave-digger in his alteration of the tragedy of Hamlet, was not only a needless, but an unnatural violence done to the work of his favourite poet.[p]

Shakspeare's genius attended him in all his extravagances. In the licence he took of departing from the regularity of the drama, or in his ignorance of those critical rules which might have restrained him within it, there is this advantage, that it gives him an opportunity of delineating the passions and affections of the human mind, as they exist in reality, with all the various colourings which they receive in the mixed scenes of life; not as they are accommodated by the hands of more artificial poets to one great undivided impression, or an uninterrupted chain of congenial events. It seems

[p] "It is the church-yard scene, in the fifth act," observes M. Egestorf, "from which we are to learn the moral of this tragedy; a scene that has been considered as an exuberant excrescence, which, however, appears to be a chief corner-stone of the main edifice; for there we see the nothingness of all sublunary advantages—there we see how gaiety, beauty, talent, and wit—how greatness and power — nay, how even the government of a world, are not only transient in themselves, but how in the end they lead to nothing."—Vide Literary Gazette for October, 1827.

therefore preposterous to endeavour to *regularize* his plays at the expense of depriving them of this peculiar excellence, especially as the alteration can only produce a very partial and limited improvement, and can never bring his pieces to the standard of criticism, or the form of the *Aristotelian* drama. Within the bounds of a pleasure-garden, we may be allowed to smooth our terraces, and trim our hedge-rows; but it were equally absurd as impracticable, to apply the minute labours of the *roller* and the *pruning-knife* to the nobler irregularity of trackless mountains and impenetrable forests.

MACKENZIE.[q]

[q] The Mirror, No. 100, April 22, 1780.—If, as is asserted at the close of this paper, the licence which Shakspeare assumed, enabled him to paint the passions and affections of the human mind as they exist in reality, and not as they are accommodated by more artificial poets to an arbitrary and exclusive system, who shall or can regret his infringement of any strict observance of the unities of time and place?

No. XI.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET.

THOUGH hundreds of critics have written of Shakspeare and his works, and though not only all his characters, but even their most minute and unimportant expressions, have been weighed and sifted; yet such is the boundless range of his intellect, that each play still retains all the charm of the very freshest novelty, and on each successive perusal a swarm of unexpected ideas seems to rise up from every page. Though the discussion of his genius has been thus incessant, the public mind is still unsated; and we all turn to any criticism on Shakspeare with an interest and curiosity felt towards no other mortal being. We entertain a kind of religious faith in his poetry. We have all rejoiced in the broad and open light of his inspiration; and in the midst of that doubt, and darkness, and perplexity, which often brood over his delineation of human passion, we eagerly turn to every voice that tries to explain or elucidate any of those solemn mysteries, being well assured that they all are the mysteries of nature.

We take up a play, and ideas come rolling in upon us, like waves impelled by a strong wind.

There is in the ebb and flow of Shakspeare's soul all the grandeur of a mighty operation of nature; and when we think or speak of him, it should be with humility, where we do not understand, and a conviction that it is rather to the narrowness of our own ken than to any failing in the art of the great magician, that we ought to attribute any sense of imperfection and of weakness which may assail us during the contemplation of his created worlds.

I believe that our admiration, and wonder, and love of our mighty dramatist are so intense, that we cannot endure any long, regular, and continued criticism upon him; for we know that there is an altitude of his soul which cannot be taken, and a depth that may not be fathomed. We wish rather to have some flashings of thought—some sudden streams of light thrown over partial regions of the mental scenery,—the veil of clouds here and there uplifted, and the sound of the cataract to be unexpectedly brought upon the silence. We ask not for a picture of the whole landscape of the soul, nor for a guide who shall be able to point out all its wonders; but we are glad to listen to every one who has travelled through the kingdoms of Shakspeare. Something interesting there must be even in the humblest journal; and we turn with equal pleasure from the converse of those who have climbed over the magnificence of the highest mountains there, to the lowlier tales of less am-

bitious pilgrims, who have sat on the green and sunny knoll, beneath the whispering tree, and by the music of the gentle rivulet.[r]

When I single out the tragedy of HAMLET, I enter, as it were, into a wilderness of thought where I know my soul must soon be lost, but from which it cannot return to our every-day world, without bringing back with it some lofty and mysterious conceptions, and a deeper insight into some of the most inscrutable recesses of human nature.

Shakspeare himself, had he even been as great a critic as a poet, could not have written a regular dissertation on Hamlet. So ideal, and yet so real an existence, could have been shadowed out only in the colours of poetry. When a character deals solely or chiefly with this world and its events, when it acts, and is acted upon, by objects that have a palpable existence, we see it distinctly, as if it were cast in a material mould,—as if it partook of the fixed and settled lineaments of the things on which it lavishes its sensibilities and its passions. We see, in such cases, the vision of an individual soul, as we see the vision of an individual countenance. We can describe both, and can let a

[r] Never was there a more eloquent description than this of the avidity and gratification with which every ingenious illustration of Shakspeare, as of a being gifted beyond others in the mysteries of nature, is read and studied. May it not without much presumption be considered as highly recommendatory of the object, and, as the editor hopes, not inapplicable to the character of the present volume?

stranger into our knowledge. But how tell in words, so pure, so fine, so ideal an abstraction as HAMLET? We can indeed figure to ourselves generally his princely form, that outshone all other manly beauty, and adorn it with the consummation of all liberal accomplishment. We can behold in every look, every gesture, every motion, the future king,

> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword:
> Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
> Th' observ'd of all observers!—

But when we would penetrate into his spirit,—meditate on those things on which he meditates,—accompany him even unto the brink of eternity,—fluctuate with him on the ghastly sea of despair,—soar with him into the purest and serenest regions of human thought,—feel with him the curse of beholding iniquity, and the troubled delight of thinking on innocence, and gentleness, and beauty,—come with him, from all the glorious dreams cherished by a noble spirit in the halls of wisdom and philosophy, of a sudden into the gloomy courts of sin, and incest, and murder,—shudder with him over the broken and shattered fragments of all the fairest creation of his fancy,—be borne with him at once from calm, and lofty, and delighted speculations, into the very heart of fear, and horror, and tribulation,—have the agonies and the guilt of our mortal world brought into immediate contact with the world beyond the grave,

and the influence of an awful shadow hanging for ever on our thoughts,—be present at a fearful combat between all the stirred-up passions of humanity in the soul of one man,—a combat in which one and all of those passions are alternately victorious and overcome,—I say, that when we are thus placed and thus acted upon, how is it possible to draw a character of this sublime drama, or of the mysterious being who is its moving spirit? In him, his character and his situation, there is a concentration of all the interests that belong to humanity. There is scarcely a trait of frailty or of grandeur, which may have endeared to us our most beloved friends in real life, that is not to be found in Hamlet. Undoubtedly Shakspeare loved him beyond all his other creations. Soon as he appears on the stage, we are satisfied. When absent, we long for his return. This is the only play which exists almost altogether in the character of one single person. Who ever knew a Hamlet in real life? Yet who, ideal as the character is, feels not its reality? This is the wonder. We love him not, we think of him not, because he was witty,—because he was melancholy,—because he was filial; but we love him because he existed, and was himself. This is the grand sum-total of the impression. I believe that of every other character, either in tragic or epic poetry, the story makes a part of the conception; but of Hamlet, the deep and permanent interest is the conception of himself. This seems to belong, not to the character being more

perfectly drawn, but to there being a more intense conception of individual human life than perhaps in any other human composition; that is, a being with springs of thought, and feeling, and action, deeper than we can search. These springs rise from an unknown depth, and in that depth there seems to be a *oneness* of being which we cannot distinctly behold, but which we believe to be there; and thus irreconcileable circumstances, floating on the surface of his actions, have not the effect of making us doubt the truth of the general picture.*

A good play is an imitation of life, in as far as the actions, and events, and passions of a few hours can represent those of a whole lifetime. Yet, after all, it is but a segment of a circle that we can behold. Were the dramatist to confine himself to that narrow limit, how little could he achieve! He takes, therefore, for granted, a knowledge, and a sympathy, and a passion in his spectators, that extends to, and permeates the existence of his characters long anterior to the short period which his art can embrace. He expects, and he expects reasonably, that we are not to look upon every thing acted and said before us absolutely as it is said or acted. It is his business to make us comprehend the whole man from

* I would particularly point out this attempt to develope the peculiar nature of the interest derived from the exhibition or study of the character of Hamlet, as singularly just and profound.

a part of his existence; but we are not to be passive spectators. It is our business to fill up and supply. It is our business to bring to the contemplation of an imaginary drama a knowledge of real life, and no more to cry out against apparent inconsistencies and violations of character as we behold them in poetry, than as we every day behold them exemplified by living men. The pageants that move before us on the stage, however deeply they may interest us, are, after all, mere strangers. It is Shakspeare alone who can give to fleeting phantoms the definite interest of real personages. But we ought not to turn this glorious power against himself. We ought not to demand inexorably the same perfect, and universal, and embracing truth of character in an existence brought before us in a few hurried scenes (which is all a play can be) that we sometimes may think we find in a real being, after long years of intimate knowledge, and which, did we know more, would perhaps seem to us to be truth no longer, but a chaos of the wildest and darkest inconsistencies.[1]

A tragedy is a leaf torn from the book of fate. Shakspeare's story is like nature in this, that you do not see the links of action, but you see powers

[1] Notwithstanding the popularity of Shakspeare, how seldom is it that a spectator or reader of his plays is furnished with a knowledge of life and character adequate to the full comprehension of the depth, and accuracy, and extensive range of his draughts from nature!

manifesting themselves with intervals of obscurity. To improve the plots of his plays, with all their apparent faults, would be something like improving the history of England. We feel that the things have happened in nature, and for whatever has happened, I presume there is a good reason. Shakspeare's soul is like Intellect, descending into the world, and putting on human life, faculties, and sense, whereby to know the world. It thus sees all things in their beauty and power, and in their true relation to man and to each other; but not shaken by them, like man. He sees beauty in external nature,—in men's souls,—in children,—in Ariel,—in Imogen,—in thought,—in fancy,—in feeling,—in passion,—in moral being,—in melody,—not in one thing; but wherever it is, he has the discernment of it. So also of power, and of all other relations and properties of being which the human spirit can comprehend. I think that what his character wanted is purity and loftiness of will, and that almost all the faults of his plays, and, above all, his exceedingly bad jokes belong to this defect. In these he yielded from his nature, though we cannot doubt that his nature had pure delight in all things great and good, lofty, pure, and beautiful. If this be not the truth, where is the solution of the difficulty to be found? Not, surely, in his yielding in base subservience to the spirit of the age. He was above that, as Milton was above it, and as all the noblest spirits of earth have been before and since.

I feel that I should be guilty of presumption, were I, after all that has been said of Hamlet's character, to attempt giving a regular delineation of it. Surely there is in his nature all that exalted and potent spirit, entered into union with bodily life, can produce, from the ethereal breathings of his mind down to the exquisite delicacy of his senses. If there be any thing disproportioned in his mind, it seems to be this only,—that intellect is in excess. It is even ungovernable, and too subtle. His own description of perfect man ending with "In apprehension how like a god!" appears to me consonant with this character, and spoken in the high and over-wrought consciousness of intellect. Much that requires explanation in the play, may perhaps be explained by this predominance and consciousness of great intellectual power. Is it not possible that the instantaneous idea of feigning himself mad belongs to this? It is the power most present to his mind, and therefore in that, though in the denial of it, is his first thought to place his defence. So might we suppose a brave man of gigantic bodily strength counterfeiting cowardice and imbecility till there came a moment for the rousing up of vengeance; so Brutus, the lover of freedom, assumed the manners of an ideot-slave, till the destined call was heard that brought him out to the deliverance of his country. I scarcely think that moral sensibility was the chief characteristic of his mind, as Richardson has said in his excellent essay, and still less morbid sensibility, as

many others have affirmed; but I should say that the spiritual nature is strong in his mind, and perfect,—that therefore he is moral and just in all his affections, complete in all his faculties. He is a being of power by high and clear intuition, and not by violence of will. In him will seems an exceedingly inferior faculty, only arising at times in obedience to higher faculties, and always waiting the termination of their conflict.

If there be truth in these very imperfect notions, I do not see why we should wonder greatly at Hamlet's extreme perplexity, depression, and irresolution. All at once there was imposed upon him a greater duty than he knew how to execute. Had his soul been unshaken, and in possession of all its clearness of power, perhaps even then such duty had been too great. It was his business to kill his uncle, without decidedly endangering his own life, and also justifiably to the country. For a mind, which till then had lived only in speculative thought, to find, upon entering the world, such a fearful work to be done in it, was perplexing and appalling. He comes at once into contention with the great powers of the world,—he is to preserve himself among them, and to employ them for the destruction of another. To a high intellectual mind, there is perhaps something repugnant at all times in meddling with such powers; for there is something blind and violent in their motion, and an intellectual mind would desire in action the clearness of thought. Hamlet therefore never gets

farther, I believe, than one step—that of self-protection in feigning himself mad. He sees no course clear enough to satisfy his understanding; and with all due deference to those critics in conduct who seem disposed to censure his dilatoriness, I should be glad if any body would point out one. He is therefore by necessity irresolute; but he feels that he is letting time pass; and the consciousness of duty undone weighs down his soul. He thus comes to dread the clear knowledge of his own situation, and of the duties arising from it. He dreads the light of the necessities that are upon him; and when the hour to act comes, he hides himself from it. Sometimes he sets illusions between himself and truth, and sometimes he merely passes, by simple transition, from the painful faculties of his mind to those he likes better.

We are not justified in asserting that Hamlet had not faculties for action, and that he was purely a meditative spirit. The most actively heroic would have paused in a situation of such overwhelming exigences, and with such an unhinging shock of feelings. When he does act, he acts with great energy, decision, directness, skill, and felicity of event. Nothing undertaken against him succeeds, except murder, which will succeed against any man; and, perhaps, more ostentatious heroes, after they had received their own death-wound, would, unlike Hamlet, have allowed the incestuous king to escape their vengeance.

It has been much canvassed by critics, whether

Hamlet's madness was altogether feigned, or in some degree real. Most certain it is, that his whole perfect being had received a shock that had unsettled his faculties. That there was disorder in his soul, none can doubt,—that is, a shaking and unsettling of its powers from their due sources of action. But who can believe for a moment that there was in his mind the least degree of that, which, with physiological meaning, we call disease? Such a supposition would at once destroy that intellectual sovereignty in his being, which in our eyes constitutes his exaltation. Shakspeare never could intend that we should be allowed to feel pity for a mind to which we were meant to bow; nor does it seem to me consistent with the nature of his own imagination, to have subjected one of his most ideal beings to such mournful mortal infirmity. That the limits of disorder are not easily distinguishable in the representation, is certain. How should they? The limits of disorder, in reality, lie in the mysterious and inscrutable depths of nature. Neither, surely, could it be intended by Shakspeare that Hamlet should for a moment cease to be a moral agent, as he must then have been. Look on him upon all great occasions, when, had there been madness in his mind, it would have been most remarkable;—look on him in his mother's closet, or listen to his dying words, and then ask if there was any disease of madness in that soul."

" It is impossible for a moment to conceive that Shakspeare

It has often struck me that the behaviour of Hamlet to Ophelia has appeared more incomprehensible than it really is, from an erroneous opinion generally entertained, that his love for her was profound. Though it is impossible to reconcile all parts of his conduct towards her with each other, or almost any theory, yet some great difficulties are got over by supposing that Shakspeare merely intended to describe a youthful, an accidental, and transient affection on the part of Hamlet. There was nothing in Ophelia that could make her the engrossing object of passion to so majestic a spirit. It would appear that what captivated him in her was, that being a creature of pure, innocent, virgin nature, but still of mere nature only, she yet exhibited, in great beauty, the spiritual tendencies of nature. There is in her frame the extacy of animal life,—of breathing, light-seeing life betraying itself, even in her disordered mind, in snatches of old songs (not in her own words), of which the associations belong to a kind of innocent voluptuousness. There is, I think, in all we ever see of her, a fancy and character of her affections suitable to this; that is, to the purity and beauty of almost

ever intended to represent the mental faculties of Hamlet, though powerfully and deeply influenced by the circumstances around him, and simulating madness for purposes of personal safety and effective retribution, as under any degree of morbid derangement: all moral responsibility and intellectual greatness of character would vanish on such a supposition.

material nature. To a mind like Hamlet's, which is almost perfectly spiritual, but of a spirit loving nature and life, there must have been something touching, and delightful, and captivating in Ophelia, as almost an ideal image of nature and of life. The acts and indications of his love seem to be merely suitable to such a feeling. I see no one mark of that love which goes even into the blood, and possesses all the regions of the soul. Now, the moment that his soul has sickened even unto the death—that love must cease, and there can remain only tenderness, sorrow, and pity. We should also remember that the sickness of his soul arose in a great measure from the momentary sight he has had into the depths of the invisible world of female hollowness and iniquity. That other profounder love, which in my opinion he had not, would not have been so affected. It would either have resisted and purged off the baser fire victoriously, or it would have driven him raving mad. But he seems to me to part with his love without much pain. It certainly has almost ceased.

His whole conduct (at least previous to Ophelia's madness and death) is consistent with such feelings. He felt that it became him to crush in Ophelia's heart all hopes of his love. Events had occurred, almost to obliterate that love from his soul. He sought her, therefore, in his assumed madness, to show her the fatal truth, and that in a way not to humble her spirit by the consciousness

of being forsaken, and no more beloved; but to prove that nature herself had set an insuperable bar between them, and that, when reason was gone, there must be no thought of love. Accordingly, his first wild interview as described by her, is of that character; and afterwards, in that scene when he tells her to go to a nunnery, and in which his language is the assumed language of a mind struggling between pretended indifference and real tenderness, Ophelia feels nothing towards him but pity and grief, a deep melancholy over the prostration of his elevated soul.

O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

Here the genius of Kemble seemed to desert him, and he threw an air of fierceness and anger over the mien and gestures of Hamlet, which must have been far indeed from the imagination of Shakspeare. It was reserved for Kean to restore nature from her profanation. In his gesticulations there is nothing insulting towards such an object. There is a kind of wild bitterness, playing towards her in the words merely—that she might know all was lost; but, in the manner of delivering these speeches, he follows the manifest exertion of the divine bard, and gives to them that mournful earnestness with which a high intellectual mind, conscious of its superiority, and severed by pain from that world of life to which Ophelia belonged, in a situation of extreme distress, speaks authoritative counsel to an inferior soul. And when,

afraid lest the gentle creature whom he deeply pities, and whom, at that moment, it may well be said he loves, might in her heart upbraid him for his cruelty, in spite even of the excuse of his apparent madness—Kean returns to Ophelia, and kisses her hand; we then indeed feel as if a burst of light broke in upon the darkness,—and truth, and nature, and Shakspeare, were at once revealed.

I need not quote passages, nor use many arguments, to prove my position, that Shakspeare never could have intended to represent Hamlet's love to Ophelia as very profound. If he did, how can we ever account for Hamlet's first exclamation, when in the church-yard he learns that he is standing by her grave, and beholds her coffin?

What, the fair Ophelia!

Was this all that Hamlet would have uttered, when struck into sudden conviction by the ghastliest terrors of death, that all he loved in human life had perished? We can with difficulty reconcile such a tame ejaculation, even with extreme tenderness and sorrow. But had it been in the soul of Shakspeare to show Hamlet in the agony of hopeless despair,—and in hopeless despair he must at that moment have been, had Ophelia been all in all to him,—is there in all his writings so utter a failure in the attempt to give vent to overwhelming passion? When, afterwards, Hamlet leaps into the grave, do we see in that any power of love? I am sorry to confess that the whole of

that scene is to me merely painful. It is anger with Laertes, not love for Ophelia, that makes Hamlet leap into the grave. Laertes' conduct, he afterwards tells us, "put him into a towering passion,"—a state of mind which it is not very easy to reconcile with almost any kind of sorrow for the dead Ophelia. Perhaps in this, Shakspeare may have departed from nature; but had he been attempting to describe the behaviour of an empassioned lover at the grave of his beloved, I should be compelled to feel that he had not merely departed from nature, but that he had offered her the most profane violation and insult.

Hamlet is afterwards made acquainted with the sad history of Ophelia; he knows that to the death of Polonius, and his own imagined madness, is to be attributed her miserable catastrophe. Yet, after the burial scene, he seems utterly to have forgotten that Ophelia ever existed; nor is there, as far as I recollect, a single allusion to her throughout the rest of the drama. The only way of accounting for this seems to be, that Shakspeare had himself forgotten her,—that with her last rites she vanished from the world of his memory. But this of itself shows that it was not his intention to represent Ophelia as the dearest of all earthly things or thoughts to Hamlet, or surely there would have been some melancholy, some miserable haunting of her image. But even as it is, it seems

not a little unaccountable that Hamlet should have been so slightly affected by her death.[v]

Of the character of Ophelia, and the situation she holds in the action of the play, I need say little. Every thing about her is young, beautiful, artless, innocent, and touching. She comes before us in striking contrast to the queen, who, fallen as she is, feels the influence of her simple and happy virgin purity. Amid the frivolity, flattery, fawning, and artifice of a corrupted court, she moves in all the unpolluted loveliness of nature. She is like an artless, gladsome, and spotless shepherdess, with the gracefulness of society hanging like a transparent veil over her natural beauty. But we feel from the first that her lot is to be mournful. The world in which she lives is not worthy of her. And soon as we connect her destiny with Hamlet, we know that darkness is to overshadow her, and that sadness and sorrow will step in between her and the ghost-haunted avenger of his father's murder. Soon as our pity is excited for her, it continues gradually to deepen; and when she appears in her madness, we are not more prepared to weep over all its most pathetic movements, than

[v] Notwithstanding all the ingenuity here exerted to persuade us that the attachment of Hamlet to Ophelia was slight and transient, I cannot but adhere to the opinions of Mackenzie and Egestorf, the latter of whom asserts, and truly asserts, I think, not only that he really loved her, but that *it is evident from his conduct at her grave.*

we afterwards are to hear of her death. Perhaps the description of that catastrophe by the queen is poetical rather than dramatic; but its exquisite beauty prevails, and Ophelia, dying and dead, is still the same Ophelia that first won our love. Perhaps the very forgetfulness of her, throughout the remainder of the play, leaves the soul at full liberty to dream of the departed. She has passed away from the earth like a beautiful air—a delightful dream. There would have been no place for her in the agitation and tempest of the final catastrophe. We are satisfied that she is in her grave; and in place of beholding her involved in the shocking troubles of the closing scene, we remember that her heart lies at rest, and the remembrance is like the returning voice of melancholy music.*

With all the mighty power which this tragedy possesses over us, arising from qualities now very generally described; yet, without that kingly shadow, who throws over it such preternatural grandeur, it never could have gained so universal an ascendancy over the minds of men. A spectre in a play of genius is always terrible. When it appears, there seems an end of acting—it is reality. The stage is a world of imagination disclosed to our waking, seeing eyes; but often, men acting

* I must be allowed here to remark that, though the author professes to say *little of Ophelia*, yet what he has said is of exquisite beauty, and superior, I think, to any thing previously said on the same subject.

men, are not the apparent agents of the imagination. To children and to the people, the unrealising parts of the apparatus, the dresses, scenery, &c., are sufficiently powerful to wrap the real men from their eyes; and such spectators see before them the personifications of the poet. To them a king is a king. We are past this. To us, a play loses its power by want of its hold on the imagination. Now, the reality of a ghost is measured to that state of imagination in which we ought to be held for the fullest powers of tragedy. The appearance of such a phantom at once throws open those recesses of the inner spirit over which flesh was closing. Magicians, thunder-storms, and demons, produce upon me something of the same effect. I feel myself brought instantaneously back to the creed of childhood. Imagination then seems not a power which I exert, but an impulse which I obey. It would be well for poetry, if more of this kind of imagination remained among us. It would seem that the Greeks preserved it during their highest civilization. Without it, the gods and goddesses of the Greek theatre would have been ludicrous and offensive; but with it they were beautiful, august, glorious—or awful, appalling, terrible. Thus were the Furies of Æschylus too fearful to be looked on; and thus does the Ghost in Hamlet carry us into the presence of eternity.

Never was a more majestic spirit more majestically revealed. The shadow of his kingly grandeur,

and his warlike might, rests massily upon him. He passes before us sad, silent, and stately. He brings the whole weight of the tragedy in his disclosures. His speech is ghost-like, and blends with ghost-conceptions. The popular memory of his words proves how profoundly they sink into our souls. The preparation for his first appearance is most solemn. The night-watch—the more common effect on the two soldiers—the deeper effect on the next party, and their speculations—Horatio's communication with the shadow, that seems as it were half-way between their's and Hamlet's—his adjurations—the degree of impression which they produce on the Ghost's mind, who is about to speak but for the due ghost-like interruption of the bird of morning—all these things lead our minds unto the last pitch of breathless expectation; and while yet the whole weight of mystery is left hanging over the play, we feel that some dread disclosure is reserved for Hamlet's ear, and that an apparition from the world unknown is still a partaker of the noblest of all earthly affections.*

The depths of Hamlet's heart unclose at the spectral likeness of his father. Henceforth we see in him a personification of filial love. That love had been impressive, had it merely wept over a father's grave. But it assumes a more awful cha-

* For further observations on this interesting subject, I would refer my readers to a "Dissertation on the Agency of Spirits and Apparitions, and on the Ghost in Hamlet," in my "Shakspeare and his Times," vol. ii. p. 399 ad p. 418.

racter, when it at once possesses the tenderness and reverence of filial piety, joined to the superstitious,—the religious fear breathed from the pale countenance of the returning dead. There is, in this strong possession of love, something ideally beautiful, from the unlikeness of his father's character to his own,—a man, kingly and heroic,—not in the least degree withdrawn (as Hamlet was almost altogether) from the vehemence of human passions, but enjoying life in the full power and glory of impassioned nature. Hamlet, who discerns all things in their truth, is not able to avoid saying that he was killed "full of bread, with all his sins broad blown, as flush as May;" yet, in saying so, he does not in his heart depart from feelings of religious filial reverence. He sees the fine consistency of the whole character, and feels that, "take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again." I think the great beauty of these two lines in part arises from this dissimilitude. There is in Hamlet a kind of speculative consideration of his father's character and being; and yet, in the pride and power of the consciousness of his own intellectual endowments, he does not for one moment doubt that he ought to bow down before the majesty of mere human life in his father, and serve as a mere instrument of his revenge. He thus at once adopts, blindly and instinctively, a feeling which perfectly belonged to his father's human life, but which, for himself, could have no part in his own.

The effect at first produced by the apparition is ever afterwards wonderfully sustained. I do not merely allude to the touches of realization which, in the poetry of the scenes, pass away from no memory,—such as, "The Star,"—"Where now it burns,"—"The sepulchre,"—"The complete steel,"—"The glimpses of the moon,"—"Making night hideous,"—"Look how pale he glares,"—and other wild expressions, which are like fastenings by which the mind clings to its terror. I rather allude to the whole conduct of the Ghost. We ever behold in it a troubled spirit leaving its place of suffering to revisit the life it had left, to direct and command a retribution that must be accomplished. He speaks of the pain to which he is gone, but that fades away in the purpose of his mission. "Pity me not."—He bids Hamlet revenge, though there is not the passion of revenge in his discourse. The penal fires have purified the grosser man. The spectre utters but a moral declaration of guilt, and swears its living son to the fulfilment of a righteous vengeance.

T. C.[1]

[1] Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, vol ii. p 504, et seq.

No. XII.

A DELINEATION OF SHAKSPEARE'S CHARACTERS OF MACBETH AND RICHARD.

THERE are two very striking characters delineated by our great dramatic poet, which I am desirous of bringing together under one review; and these are *Macbeth* and *Richard the Third*.

The parts which these two persons sustain in their respective dramas, have a remarkable coincidence: both are actuated by the same guilty ambition in the opening of the story; both murder their lawful sovereign in the course of it; and both are defeated and slain in battle at the conclusion of it: yet these two characters, under circumstances so similar, are as strongly distinguished in every passage of their dramatic life by the art of the poet, as any two men ever were by the hand of nature.

Let us contemplate them in the three following periods, viz.: the premeditation of their crime; the perpetration of it; and the catastrophe of their death.

Duncan, the reigning king of Scotland, has two sons: Edward the Fourth of England has also two sons; but these kings and their respective heirs do not affect the usurpers Macbeth and Richard

in the same degree, for the latter is a prince of the blood royal, brother to the king, and next in consanguinity to the throne after the death of his elder brother the Duke of Clarence: Macbeth, on the contrary, is not in the succession—

> ——— And to be king
> Stands not within the prospect of belief.

His views, therefore, being further removed and more out of hope, a greater weight of circumstances should be thrown together to tempt and encourage him to an undertaking so much beyond *the prospect of his belief*. The art of the poet furnishes these circumstances, and the engine which his invention employs, is of a preternatural and prodigious sort. He introduces in the very opening of his scene a troop of sybils or witches, who salute Macbeth with their divinations, and in three solemn prophetic gratulations hail him *Thane of Glamis*, *Thane of Cawdor*, and *King hereafter!*

> By Sinel's death I know I'm thane of Glamis;
> But how of Cawdor?

One part of the prophecy, therefore, is true; the remaining promises become more deserving of belief. This is one step in the ladder of his ambition, and mark how artfully the poet has laid it in his way. No time is lost; the wonderful machinery is not suffered to stand still, for behold a verification of the second prediction, and a courtier thus addresses him from the king:—

> And for an earnest of a greater honour,
> He bade me from him call thee THANE OF CAWDOR.

The magic now works to his heart, and he cannot wait the departure of the royal messenger before his admiration vents itself aside—

> ——— Glamis, and thane of Cawdor!
> The greatest is behind.

A second time he turns aside, and unable to repress the emotions which this second confirmation of the predictions has excited, repeats the same secret observation—

> ——— Two truths are told
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme.

A soliloquy then ensues, in which the poet judiciously opens enough of his character to show the spectator that these preternatural agents are not superfluously set to work upon a disposition prone to evil, but one that will have to combat many compunctious struggles before it can be brought to yield even to oracular influence. This alone would demonstrate (if we needed demonstration) that Shakspeare, without resorting to the ancients, had the judgment of ages as it were instinctively. From this instant we are apprised that Macbeth meditates an attack upon our pity as well as upon our horror, when he puts the following question to his conscience—

> ——— Why do I yield to that suggestion,
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature?

Now let us turn to *Richard*, in whose cruel heart no such remorse finds place; he needs no tempter. There is here no *dignus vindice nodus*, nor indeed any *knot* at all; for he is already practised in murder: ambition is his ruling passion, and a crown is in view; and he tells you at his very first entrance on the scene—

> I am determined to be a villain.

We are now presented with a character full formed and complete for all the savage purposes of the drama:—

> Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.

The barriers of conscience are broken down, and the soul, hardened against shame, avows its own depravity:—

> Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
> To set my brother Clarence and the king
> In deadly hate the one against the other.

He observes no gradations in guilt, expresses no hesitation, practises no refinements, but plunges into blood with the familiarity of long custom, and gives orders to his assassins to dispatch his brother Clarence with all the unfeeling tranquillity of a Nero or Caligula. Richard, having no longer any scruples to manage with his own conscience, is

exactly in the predicament which the dramatic poet *Diphilus* has described with such beautiful simplicity of expression—

> Ὅστις γαρ αὐτος αὐτον οὐκ αἰσχυνεται,
> Συνειδοθ' αὐτω φαυλα διαπεπραγμενω,
> Πως τον γε μηδεν εἰδοτ' αἰσχυνθησεται·

The wretch who knows his own vile deeds, and yet fears not himself, how should he fear another, who knows them not?

It is manifest therefore that there is an essential difference in the developement of these characters, and that in favour of Macbeth. In his soul cruelty seems to dawn; it breaks out with faint glimmerings, like a winter-morning, and gathers strength by slow degrees. In Richard it flames forth at once, mounting like the sun between the tropics, and enters boldly on its career without a herald. As the character of Macbeth has a moral advantage in this distinction, so has the drama of that name a much more interesting and affecting cast. The struggles of a soul naturally virtuous, whilst it holds the guilty impulse of ambition at bay, affords the noblest theme for the drama, and puts the creative fancy of our poet upon a resource, in which he has been rivalled only by the great father of tragedy, Æschylus, in the prophetic effusions of Cassandra, the incantations of the Persian magi for raising the ghost of Darius, and the imaginary terrific forms of his furies; with all which

our countryman probably had no acquaintance, or at most a very obscure one.[a]

CUMBERLAND.[b]

[a] The latter part of this number, here omitted, and which includes a comparison between Æschylus and Shakspeare, will be found in the second part of our volume.

[b] The Observer, No. 55.

No. XIII.

ON THE CHARACTERS OF MACBETH AND RICHARD CONTINUED.

WE are now to attend *Macbeth* to the perpetration of the murder which puts him in possession of the crown of Scotland; and this introduces a new personage on the scene, his accomplice and wife: she thus developes her own character—

> ——————Come, all you spirits,
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me from the crown to the toe topful
> Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
> Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief: Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell!

Terrible invocation! Tragedy can speak no stronger language, nor could any genius less than Shakspeare's support a character of so lofty a pitch, so sublimely terrible at the very opening.

The part which Lady Macbeth fills in the drama, has a relative as well as positive importance, and serves to place the repugnance of Macbeth in

the strongest point of view; she is in fact the auxiliary of the witches, and the natural influence which so high and predominant a spirit asserts over the tamer qualities of her husband, makes those witches but secondary agents for bringing about the main action of the drama. This is well worth a remark; for if they, which are only artificial and fantastic instruments, had been made the sole or even principal movers of the great incident of the murder, nature would have been excluded from her share in the drama, and Macbeth would have become the mere machine of an uncontrollable necessity; and his character, being robbed of its free agency, would have left no moral behind. I must take leave therefore to anticipate a remark, which I shall hereafter repeat, that when Lady Macbeth is urging her lord to the murder, not a word is dropped by either, of the witches or their predictions. It is in these instances of his conduct that Shakspeare is so wonderful a study for the dramatic poet. But I proceed—

Lady Macbeth, in her first scene, from which I have already extracted a passage, prepares for an attempt upon the conscience of her husband, whose nature she thus describes—

> ——————Yet do I fear thy nature;
> It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way.

He arrives before she quits the scene, and she receives him with consummate address—

——Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both by the All-hail hereafter!

These are the very gratulations of the witches: she welcomes him with confirmed predictions, with the tempting salutations of ambition, not with the softening caresses of a wife—

MACB. Duncan comes here to-night.
LADY. And when goes hence?
MACB. To-morrow, as he purposes.
LADY. Oh never
Shall sun that morrow see!

The rapidity of her passion hurries her into immediate explanation, and he, consistently with the character she had described, evades her precipitate solicitations with a short indecisive answer—

We will speak further—

His reflections upon this interview, and the dreadful subject of it are soon after given in soliloquy, in which the poet has mixed the most touching strokes of compunction with his meditations. He reasons against the villainy of the act, and honour jointly with nature assails him with an argument of double force:—

——He's here in double trust;
First as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then as his host,
Who should against the murtherer shut the door,
Not bear the knife himself.

This appeal to nature, hospitality, and allegiance,

was not without its impression: he again meets his lady, and immediately declares—

> We will proceed no further in this business.

This draws a retort upon him, in which his tergiversation and cowardice are satirized with so keen an edge, and interrogatory reproaches are pressed so fast upon him, that catching hold in his retreat of one small but precious fragment in the wreck of innocence and honour, he demands a truce from her attack, and with the spirit of a combatant who has not yet yielded up his weapons, cries out—

> Pr'ythee, peace!

The words are no expletives; they do not fill up a sentence, but they form one. They stand in a most important pass; they defend the breach her ambition has made in his heart, a breach in the very citadel of humanity; they mark the last dignified struggle of virtue, and they have a double reflecting power, which in the first place shows that nothing but the voice of authority could stem the torrent of her invective, and in the next place announces that something, worthy of the solemn audience he had demanded, was on the point to follow—and worthy it is to be a standard sentiment of moral truth expressed with proverbial simplicity, sinking into every heart that hears it—

> I dare do all that may become a man,
> Who dares do more is none.

How must every feeling spectator lament that a man should fall from virtue with such an appeal upon his lips!

Οὐκ ἐστιν οὐδεις, ὁ δεδοικως νομον.

PHILONIDES.

A man is not a coward because he fears to be unjust, is the sentiment of an old dramatic poet.

Macbeth's principle is honour; cruelty is natural to his wife; ambition is common to both: one passion favourable to her purpose has taken place in his heart; another still hangs about it, which being adverse to her plot, is first to be expelled, before she can instil her cruelty into his nature. The sentiment above quoted had been firmly delivered, and was ushered in with an apostrophe suitable to its importance: she feels its weight; she perceives it is not to be turned aside with contempt, or laughed down by ridicule, as she had already done where weaker scruples had stood in the way; but, taking sophistry in aid, by a ready turn of argument she gives him credit for his sentiment, erects a more glittering though fallacious logic upon it, and, by admitting his objection, cunningly confutes it—

> ——————What beast was't then,
> That made you break this enterprize to me?
> When you durst do it, then you were a man,
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more than man.

Having thus parried his objection by a sophistry

calculated to blind his reason, and enflame his ambition, she breaks forth into such a vaunting display of hardened intrepidity, as presents one of the most terrific pictures that was ever imagined—

> ——————I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, whilst it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from its boneless gums,
> And dash'd its brains out, had I but so sworn
> As you have done to this.

This is a note of horror, screwed to a pitch that bursts the very sinews of nature. She no longer combats with human weapon, but seizing the flash of the lightning, extinguishes her opponent with the stroke. Here the controversy must end, for he must either adopt her spirit, or take her life. He sinks under the attack, and offering nothing in delay of execution but a feeble hesitation, founded in fear—*If we should fail,*—he concludes with an assumed ferocity, caught from her, and not springing from himself—

> ——————I am settled, and bend up
> Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

The strong and sublime strokes of a master impressed upon this scene make it a model of dramatic composition; and I must in this place remind the reader of the observation I have before hinted at, that no reference whatever is had to the auguries of the witches. It would be injustice to sup-

pose that this was other than a purposed omission by the poet; a weaker genius would have resorted back to these instruments. Shakspeare had used and laid them aside for a time; he had a stronger engine at work, and he could proudly exclaim—

> We defy auguries.———

Nature was sufficient for that work; and to show the mastery he had over nature, he took his human agent from the weaker sex.

This having passed in the first act, the murder is perpetrated in the succeeding one. The introductory soliloquy of Macbeth, the chimæra of the dagger, and the signal on the bell, are awful preludes to the deed. In this dreadful interim Lady Macbeth, the great superintending spirit, enters to support the dreadful work. It is done; and he returns appalled with sounds. He surveys his bloody hands with horror; he starts from her proposal of going back to besmear the guards of Duncan's chamber; and she snatches the reeking daggers from his trembling hands to finish the imperfect work—

> ————Infirm of purpose,
> Give me the daggers!

She returns on the scene; the deed which he revolted from is performed; and with the same unshaken ferocity she vauntingly displays her bloody trophies, and exclaims—

> My hands are of your colour, but I shame
> To wear a heart so white.

Fancied noises, the throbbings of his own quailing heart, had shaken the constancy of Macbeth. Real sounds, the certain signals of approaching visiters, to whom the situation of Duncan must be revealed, do not intimidate her; she is prepared for all trials, and coolly tells him—

> ——————I hear a knocking
> At the south entry: Retire we to our chamber;
> A little water clears us of this deed.
> How easy is it then!

The several incidents thrown together in this scene of the murder of Duncan, are of so striking a sort as to need no elucidation; they are better felt than described, and my attempts point at passages of more obscurity, where the touches are thrown into shade, and the art of the author lies more out of sight.

Lady Macbeth being now retired from the scene, we may, in this interval, permit the genius of Æschylus to introduce a rival murderess on the stage.

Clytemnestra has received her husband Agamemnon, on his return from the capture of Troy, with studied rather than cordial congratulations. He opposes the pompous ceremonies she had devised for the display of his entry, with a magnanimous contempt of such adulation—

> ——————Sooth me not with strains
> Of adulation, as a girl; nor raise
> As to some proud barbaric king, that loves

Loud acclamations echoed from the mouths
Of prostrate worshippers, a clamorous welcome:
Spread not the streets with tapestry: 'tis invidious;
These are the honours we should pay the gods;
For mortal men to tread on ornaments
Of rich embroidery—no; I dare not do it:
Respect me as a man, not as a god.

POTTER'S ÆSCHYLUS.

These are heroic sentiments; but in conclusion the persuasions of the wife overcome the modest scruples of the hero, and he enters his palace in the pomp of triumph; when soon his dying groans are echoed from the interior scene, and the adultress comes forth, besprinkled with the blood of her husband, to avow the murder—

————I struck him twice, and twice
He groaned; then died. A third time as he lay
I gor'd him with a wound; a grateful present
To the stern god, that in the realms below
Reigns o'er the dead. There let him take his seat.
He lay; and spouting from his wounds a stream
Of blood bedew'd me with these crimson drops.
I glory in them, like the genial earth,
When the warm showers of heav'n descend and wake
The flowrets to unfold their vermeil leaves.
Come then, ye reverend senators of Argos,
Joy with me, if your hearts be turn'd to joy,
And such I wish them. POTTER.

CUMBERLAND.[b]

[b] The Observer, No. 56. The character of Clytemnestra," observes a periodical critic, "may be weighed without disparagement against that of Lady Macbeth; but all the other delineations are superior in our Shakspeare: his characters are

more various, more marked, more consistent, more natural, more intuitive. The style of Æschylus, if distinguished for a majestic energetic simplicity, greatly preferable to the mixed metaphors and puns of Shakspeare, has still neither the richness of thought, nor the versatility of diction, which we find displayed in the English tragedy."—Monthly Review, vol. lxxxi. p. 120.

No. XIV.

ON THE CHARACTERS OF MACBETH AND RICHARD CONTINUED.

RICHARD perpetrates several murders; but as the poet has not marked them with any distinguishing circumstances, they need not be enumerated on this occasion. Some of these he commits in his passage to power, others after he has seated himself on the throne. Ferociousness and hypocrisy are the prevailing features of his character; and as he has no one honourable or humane principle to combat, there is no opening for the poet to develope those secret workings of conscience, which he has so naturally done in the case of Macbeth.

The murder of Clarence, those of the queen's kinsmen and of the young princes in the Tower, are all perpetrated in the same style of hardened cruelty. He takes the ordinary method of hiring ruffians to perform his bloody commissions, and there is nothing which particularly marks the scenes wherein he imparts his purposes and instructions to them: a very little management serves even for Tirrel, who is not a professional murderer, but is reported to be—

—— a discontented gentleman,
Whose humble means match not his haughty spirit.

With such a spirit Richard does not hold it necessary to use much circumlocution, and seems more in dread of delay than disappointment or discovery:—

R. Is thy name Tirrel?
T. James Tirrel, and your most obedient subject.
R. Art thou indeed?
T. Prove me, my gracious lord.
R. Dar'st thou resolve to kill a friend of mine?
T. Please you, I had rather kill two enemies.
R. Why then thou hast it; two deep enemies,
Foes to my rest, and my sweet sleep's disturbers,
Are they that I would have thee deal upon:
Tirrel, I mean those bastards in the Tower.

If the reader calls to mind by what circumspect and slow degrees King John opens himself to Hubert under a similar situation with this of Richard, he will be convinced that Shakspeare considered preservation of character too important to sacrifice on any occasion to the vanity of fine writing; for the scene he has given to John, a timorous and wary prince, would ill suit the character of Richard. A close observance of nature is the first excellence of a dramatic poet, and the peculiar property of him we are reviewing.

In these two stages of our comparison, Macbeth appears with far more dramatic effect than Richard, whose first scenes present us with little else than

traits of perfidiousness, one striking incident of successful hypocrisy practised on the Lady Anne, and an open unreserved display of remorseless cruelty. Impatient of any pause or interruption in his measures, a dangerous friend and a determined foe:—

> Effera torquebant avidæ præcordia curæ
> Effugeret ne quis gladios
> Crescebat scelerata sitis; prædæque recentis
> Incæstus flagrabat amor nullusque petendi
> Cogendive pudor: crebris perjuria nectit
> Blanditiis; sociat perituro fœdere dextras:
> Si semel e tantis poscenti quisque negasset,
> Effera prætumido quatiebat corda furore.
>
> CLAUDIAN.

> The sole remorse his greedy heart can feel
> Is if one life escapes his murdering steel:
> That which should quench, inflames his craving thirst,
> The second draught still deepens on the first;
> Shameless by force or fraud to work his way,
> And no less prompt to flatter than betray:
> This hour makes friendships which he breaks the next,
> And every breach supplies a vile pretext
> Basely to cancel all concessions past,
> If in a thousand you deny the last.

Macbeth has now touched the goal of his ambition:

> Thou hast it now; King, Cawdor, Glamis, all
> The wayward sisters promis'd—

The auguries of the witches, to which no reference had been made in the heat of the main action, are now called to mind with many circum-

stances of galling aggravation, not only as to the prophecy, which gave the crown to the posterity of Banquo, but also of his own safety from the gallant and noble nature of that general—

> ——— Our fears in Banquo
> Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
> Reigns that, which would be fear'd.

Assassins are provided to murder Banquo and his son, but this is not decided upon without much previous meditation; and he seems prompted to the act more by desperation and dread than by any settled resolution or natural cruelty. He convenes the assassins, and in a conference of some length works round to his point, by insinuations calculated to persuade them to dispatch Banquo for injuries done to them, rather than from motives which respect himself; in which scene we discover a remarkable preservation of character in Macbeth, who by this artifice strives to blind his own conscience, and throw the guilt upon theirs. In this, as in the former action, there is nothing kingly in his cruelty: in one he acted under the controlling spirit of his wife; here he plays the sycophant with hired assassins, and confesses himself under awe of the superior genius of Banquo—

> ——— Under him
> My genius is rebuk'd, as it is said
> Antony's was by Cæsar.

There is not a circumstance ever so minute in

the conduct of this character, which does not point out to a diligent observer how closely the poet has adhered to nature in every part of his delineation. Accordingly we observe a peculiarity in the language of Macbeth, which is highly characteristic; I mean the figurative turn of his expressions, whenever his imagination strikes upon any gloomy subject—

> Oh! full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!

And in this state of self-torment, every object of solemnity, though ever so familiar, becomes an object of terror: night, for instance, is not mentioned by him without an accompaniment of every melancholy attribute which a frighted fancy can annex:—

> ——————Ere the bat hath flown
> His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
> The shard-born beetle with his drowsy hums
> Hath rung NIGHT's yawning peal, there shall be done
> A deed of dreadful note.

It is the darkness of his soul that makes the night so dreadful, the *scorpions in his mind* convoke these images; but he has not yet done with it—

> ——————Come, sealing NIGHT!
> Skarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;
> And with thy bloody and invisible hand
> Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond,
> Which keeps me pale. Light thickens, and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood.
> Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
> Whilst NIGHT's black agents to their prey do rouse.

The critic of language will observe that here is a redundancy and crowd of metaphors; but the critic of nature will acknowledge that it is the very truth of character, and join me in the remark which points it out.

In a tragedy so replete with murder, and in the display of a character so tortured by the *scorpions of the mind*, as this of Macbeth, it is naturally to be expected that a genius like Shakspeare's will call in the dead for their share in the horror of the scene. This he has done in two several ways: first, by the apparition of Banquo, which is invisible to all but Macbeth; secondly, by the spells and incantations of the witches, who raise spirits, which in certain enigmatical predictions shadow out his fate; and these are followed by a train of unborn revelations, drawn by the power of magic from the womb of futurity before their time.

It appears that Lady Macbeth was not a party in the assassination of Banquo, and the ghost, though twice visible to the murderer, is not seen by her. This is another incident highly worthy a particular remark; for by keeping her free from any participation in the horror of the sight, the poet is enabled to make a scene aside between Macbeth and her, which contains some of the finest speakings in the play. The ghost in Hamlet, and the ghost of Darius in Æschylus, are introduced by preparation and prelude. This of Banquo is an object of surprise as well as terror; and there is scarce an incident to be named of more striking

and dramatic effect: it is one amongst various proofs, that must convince every man, who looks critically into Shakspeare, that he was as great a master in art as in nature. How it strikes me in this point of view, I shall take the liberty of explaining more at length.

The murder of Duncan is the main incident of this tragedy; that of Banquo is subordinate. Duncan's blood was not only the first so shed by Macbeth, but the dignity of the person murdered, and the aggravating circumstances attending it, constitute a crime of the very first magnitude. For these reasons, it might be expected that the spectre most likely to haunt his imagination would be that of Duncan; and the rather, because his terror and compunction were so much more strongly excited by this first murder, perpetrated with his own hands, than by the subsequent one of Banquo, palliated by evasion, and committed to others. But when we recollect that Lady Macbeth was not only his accomplice, but in fact the first mover in the murder of the king, we see good reason why Duncan's ghost could not be called up, unless she, who so deeply partook of the guilt, had also shared in the horror of the appearance; and as visitations of a peculiar sort were reserved for her in a later period of the drama, it was a point of consummate art and judgment to exclude her from the affair of Banquo's murder, and make the more susceptible conscience of Macbeth figure this apparition in his mind's eye without any other witness to the vision.

I persuade myself these will appear very natural reasons why the poet did not raise the ghost of the king in preference, though it is reasonable to think it would have been a much more noble incident in his hands than this of Banquo. It now remains to examine whether this is more fully justified by the peculiar situation reserved for Lady Macbeth, to whom I have before adverted.

The intrepidity of her character is so marked, that we may well suppose no waking terrors could shake it; and in this light it must be acknowledged a very natural expedient to make her vent the agonies of her conscience in sleep. Dreams have been a dramatic expedient ever since there has been a drama. Æschylus recites the dream of Clytemnestra immediately before her son Orestes kills her; she fancies she has given birth to a dragon :—

> This new-born dragon, like an infant child
> Laid in the cradle, seem'd in want of food;
> And in her dream she held it to her breast:
> The milk he drew was mix'd with clotted blood.
>
> POTTER.

This, which is done by Æschylus, has been done by hundreds after him; but to introduce upon the scene the very person, walking in sleep, and giving vent to the horrid fancies that haunt her dream, in broken speeches expressive of her guilt, uttered before witnesses, and accompanied with that natural and expressive action of washing the blood from her defiled hands, was reserved for the

original and bold genius of Shakspeare only. It is an incident so full of tragic horror, so daring, and at the same time so truly characteristic, that it stands out as a prominent feature in the most sublime drama in the world, and fully compensates for any sacrifices the poet might have made in the previous arrangement of his incidents. [c]

CUMBERLAND. [d]

[c] Shakspeare has not thought it necessary to hint to us the repressed yet agonizing struggles which Lady Macbeth must have endured, ere her mind, originally so daringly masculine and fearless, could have been subdued to these terrors of imagination. But it is evident, and it is a management worthy of Shakspeare, that the repression of her feelings in her waking state served but to render her, when volition was weakened by sleep, more assuredly the victim of horror, even unto death; for, atrocious as her character is, and apparently scarcely, if at all, susceptible of remorse, yet that some portion of humanity lingered in her heart, is placed beyond all doubt from the very striking trait which the poet has thrown in, in order to link her as it were to human nature, that of declining to execute the murder of Duncan herself, when she placed the daggers in his chamber, because he resembled her "father as he slept." This touch of tenderness is alone sufficient to render probable the almost unparalleled horror of the scene which precedes her dissolution.

[d] The Observer, No. 57.

No. XV.

ON THE CHARACTERS OF MACBETH AND RICHARD CONCLUDED.

MACBETH now approaches towards his catastrophe. The heir of the crown is in arms, and he must defend valiantly what he has usurped villainously. His natural valour does not suffice for this trial: he resorts to the witches; he conjures them to give answer to what he shall ask, and he again runs into all those pleonasms of speech which I before remarked. The predictions he extorts from the apparitions are so couched as to seem favourable to him; at the same time that they correspond with events which afterwards prove fatal. The management of this incident has so close a resemblance to what the poet Claudian has done in the instance of Ruffinus's vision the night before his massacre, that I am tempted to insert the passage:—

> Ecce videt diras alludere protinus umbras,
> Quas dedit ipse neci; quarum quæ clarior una
> Visa loqui—Proh! surge toro; quid plurima volvit
> Anxius? hæc requiem rebus, finemque labori
> Allatura dies: Omne jam plebe redibis
> Altior, et læti manibus portabere vulgi—
> Has canit ambages. Occulto fallitur ille
> Omine, nec capitis fixi præsagia sensit.

A ghastly vision in the dead of night
Of mangled, murder'd ghosts appal his sight;
When hark! a voice from forth the shadowy train
Cries out—Awake! what thoughts perplex thy brain?
Awake, arise! behold the day appears,
That ends thy labours, and dispels thy fears:
To loftier heights thy tow'ring head shall rise,
And the glad crowd shall lift thee to the skies—
Thus spake the voice: He triumphs, nor beneath
Th' ambiguous omen sees the doom of death.

Confiding in his auguries, Macbeth now prepares for battle: by the first of these he is assured—

——————That none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.

By the second prediction he is told—

Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be, until
Great Birnam-wood to Dunsinane's high hill
Shall come against him.

These he calls *sweet boadments!* and concludes—

To sleep in spite of thunder.

This play is so replete with excellences, that it would exceed all bounds if I were to notice every one; I pass over, therefore, that incomparable scene between Macbeth, the physician, and Seyton, in which the agitations of his mind are so wonderfully expressed; and, without pausing for the death of Lady Macbeth, I conduct the reader to that crisis, when the messenger has announced the ominous approach of Birnam-wood.—A burst of fury, an exclamation seconded by a blow, is the

first natural explosion of a soul so stung with *scorpions* as Macbeth's. The sudden gust is no sooner discharged than nature speaks her own language; and the still voice of conscience, like reason in the midst of madness, murmurs forth these mournful words:—

> I pall in resolution, and begin
> To doubt the equivocation of the fiend,
> That lies like truth.

With what an exquisite feeling has this darling son of nature here thrown in this touching, this pathetic sentence, amidst the very whirl and eddy of conflicting passions! Here is a study for dramatic poets; this is a string for an actor's skill to touch; this will discourse sweet music to the human heart, with which it is finely unisoned when struck with the hand of a master.

The next step brings us to the last scene of Macbeth's dramatic existence. Flushed with the blood of Siward, he is encountered by Macduff, who crosses him like his evil genius. Macbeth cries out—

> Of all men else I have avoided thee.

To the last moment of character the faithful poet supports him. He breaks off from single combat, and in the tremendous pause, so beautifully contrived to hang suspense and terror on the moral scene of his exit, the tyrant driven to bay, and panting with the heat and struggle of the fight, vauntingly exclaims—

MACB. As easy may'st thou the intrenchant air
With thy keen sword impress, as make me bleed:
Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one of woman born.

MACD. Despair thy charm!
And let the angel, whom thou still hast serv'd,
Tell thee Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

MACB. Accursed be that tongue that tells me so!
For it hath cow'd my better part of man.

There sinks the spirit of Macbeth—

——————Behold! where stands
Th' usurper's cursed head!

How completely does this coincide with the passage already quoted!

— - — — —Occulto fallitur ille
Omine, nec CAPITIS FIXI præsagia sentit.[e]

[e] It cannot but be a subject of considerable regret, that the supernatural machinery of this sublime drama is so inadequately represented on the stage. "Much," I have remarked in another work, "of the dread, solemnity, and awe which is experienced in reading this play, from the intervention of the witches, is lost in its representation, owing to the injudicious custom of bringing them too forward on the scene; where, appearing little better than a group of old women, the effect intended by the poet is not only destroyed, but reversed. Their dignity and grandeur must arise, as evil beings gifted with superhuman powers, from the undefined nature both of their agency and of their external forms. Were they indistinctly seen, though audible, at a distance, and, as it were, through a hazy twilight, celebrating their orgies, and with shadowy and gigantic shape flitting between the pale blue

Let us now approach the tent of *Richard*. It is matter of admiration to observe how many incidents the poet has collected in a small compass, to set the military character of his chief personage in a brilliant point of view. A succession of scouts and messengers report a variety of intelligence, all which, though generally of the most alarming nature, he meets not only with his natural gallantry, but sometimes with pleasantry and a certain archness and repartee, which is peculiar to him throughout the drama.

It is not only a curious, but delightful task to examine by what subtle and almost imperceptible touches Shakspeare contrives to set such marks upon his characters, as give them the most living likenesses that can be conceived. In this, above all other poets that ever existed, he is a study and a model of perfection. The great distinguishing passions every poet may describe; but Shakspeare gives you their humours, their minutest foibles, those little starts and caprices, which nothing but the most intimate familiarity brings to light. Other authors write characters like historians; he, like the bosom friend of the person he describes. The

flames of their cauldron and the eager eye of the spectator, sufficient latitude would be given to the imagination, and the finest drama of our author would receive, in the theatre, that deep tone of supernatural horror with which it is felt to be so highly imbued in the solitude of the closet."—Shakspeare and his Times, vol ii. p. 488.

following extracts will furnish an example of what I have been saying.

Ratcliff informs Richard that a fleet is discovered on the western coast, supposed to be the party of Richmond:—

K. RICH. Some light-foot friend post to the Duke of Norfolk;
Ratcliff, thyself; or Catesby—Where is he?
CATES. Here, my good lord.
K. RICH. Catesby, fly to the Duke.
CATES. I will, my lord, with all convenient haste.
K. RICH. Ratcliff, come hither; post to Salisbury;
When thou com'st thither—DULL, UNMINDFUL VILLAIN! (to Catesby)
Why stay'st thou here, and go'st not to the Duke?
CATES. First, mighty liege, tell me your highness' pleasure,
What from your grace I shall deliver to him.
K. RICH. Oh, true, good Catesby!

I am persuaded I need not point out to the reader's sensibility the fine turn in this expression, *good Catesby!* How can we be surprised if such a poet makes us in love even with his villains?—Ratcliff proceeds—

RAT. What may it please you shall I do at Salisbury?
K. RICH. Why, what would'st thou do there before I go?
RAT. Your highness told me I should post before.
K. RICH. My mind is chang'd.

These fine touches can escape no man who has an eye for nature. Lord Stanley reports to Richard—

STANL. Richmond is on the seas.
K. RICH. There let him sink, and be the seas on him
White-liver'd runagate, what doth he there?

This reply is pointed with irony and invective. There are two causes in nature and character for this: first, Richard was before informed of the news; his passion was not taken by surprise, and he was enough at ease to make a play upon Stanley's words—*on the seas*—and retort—*be the seas on him!*—secondly, Stanley was a suspected subject; Richard was therefore interested to show a contempt of his competitor before a man of such doubtful allegiance. In the spirit of this impression he urges Stanley to give an explicit answer to the question—*What doth he there?* Stanley endeavours to evade by answering that he *knows not but by guess*. The evasion only strengthens Richard's suspicions, and he again pushes him to disclose what he only guesses—*Well, as you guess*—Stanley replies—

> He makes for England, here to claim the crown.
> K. Rich. Is the chair empty? Is the sword unsway'd?
> Is the king dead? the empire unpossess'd?
> What heir of York is there alive but we?
> And who is England's king but great York's heir?
> Then tell me what makes he upon the sea?

What a cluster of characteristic excellences are here before us! All these interrogatories are *ad hominem*: they fit no man but Stanley; they can be uttered by no man but Richard; and they can flow from the conceptions of no poet but the poet of nature.

Stanley's whole scene ought to be investigated for it is full of beauties; but I confess myself ex-

hausted with the task, and language does not suffice to furnish fresh terms of admiration, which a closer scrutiny would call forth.

Other messengers succeed Lord Stanley. Richard's fiery impatience does not wait the telling, but taking the outset of the account to be ominous, he strikes the courier, who, proceeding with his report, concludes with the good tidings of Buckingham's dispersion. Richard instantly retracts and says—

> ——— Oh! I cry thee mercy.
> There is my purse to cure that blow of thine.

This is another trait of the same cast with that of *good Catesby*.

Battles are of the growth of modern tragedy. I am not curious enough in the old stage to know if Shakspeare is the inventor of this bold and bustling innovation, but I am sure he is unrivalled in his execution of it; and this of Bosworth-field is a master-piece. I shall be less particular in my present description of it, because I may probably bring it under general review with other scenes of the like sort.

It will be sufficient to observe that, in the catastrophe of Richard nothing can be more glowing than the scene, nothing more brilliant than the conduct of the chief character. He exhibits the character of a perfect general, in whom however ardent courage seems the ruling feature; he performs every part of his office with minute attention;

he enquires if certain alterations are made in his armour, and even orders what particular horse he intends to charge with. He is gay with his chief officers, and even gracious to some he confides in: his gallantry is of so dazzling a quality, that we begin to feel the pride of Englishmen, and, overlooking his crimes, glory in our courageous king. Richmond is one of those civil, conscientious gentlemen, who are not very apt to captivate a spectator; and Richard, loaded as he is with enormities, rises in the comparison, and, I suspect, carries the good wishes of many of his audience into action, and dies with their regret.[f]

[f] The character of Richard owes, in fact, its interest almost entirely to its intellectuality. "Richard," I have elsewhere observed, "stripped as he is of all the softer feelings, and all the common charities of humanity, possessed of 'neither pity, love, nor fear,' and loaded with every dangerous and dreadful vice, would, were it not for his unconquerable powers of mind, be insufferably revolting. But, though insatiate in his ambition, envious and hypocritical in his disposition, cruel, bloody, and remorseless in all his deeds, he displays such an extraordinary share of cool and determined courage, such alacrity and buoyancy of spirit, such constant self-possession, such an intuitive intimacy with the workings of the human heart, and such a matchless skill in rendering them subservient to his views, as so far to subdue our detestation and abhorrence of his villainy, that we, at length, contemplate this fiend in human shape with a mingled sensation of intense curiosity and grateful terror.

"Yet, the moral of this play is great and impressive. Richard, having excited a general sense of indignation, and a general desire of revenge, and, unaware of his danger from having lost, through familiarity with guilt, all idea of moral obligation, becomes at length the victim of his own enor-

As soon as he retires to his tent, the poet begins to put in motion his great moral machinery of the ghosts. Trifles are not made for Shakspeare; difficulties, that would have plunged the spirit of any other poet, and turned his scenery into inevitable ridicule, are nothing in his way. He brings forward a long string of ghosts, and puts a speech into each of their mouths without any fear of consequences. Richard starts from his couch, and before he has shaken off the terrors of his dream, cries out—

> Give me another horse!—Bind up my wounds!—
> Have mercy, Jesu!—Soft, I did but dream—
> O coward conscience, &c.

But I may conclude my subject; every reader can go on with the soliloquy, and no words of mine can be wanted to excite their admiration.

CUMBERLAND.[s]

mous crimes; he falls not unvisited by the terrors of conscience, for, on the eve of danger and of death, the retribution of another world is placed before him; the spirits of those whom he had murdered reveal the awful sentence of his fate, and his bosom heaves with the infliction of eternal torture."—Shakspeare and his Times, vol. ii. p. 372—375.

[s] The Observer, No. 58.

No. XVI.

CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER OF FALSTAFF.

THAT "poet and creator are the same," is equally allowed in criticism as in etymology; and that, without the powers of invention and imagination, nothing great or highly delightful in poetry can be achieved.

I have often thought that the same thing holds in some measure with regard to the reader as well as the writer of poetry. Without somewhat of a congenial imagination in the former, the works of the latter will afford a very inferior degree of pleasure. The mind of him who reads should be able to imagine what the productive fancy of the poet creates and presents to his view; to look on the world of fancy set before him with a native's ear; to acknowledge its manners, to feel its passions; and to trace, with somewhat of an instinctive glance, those characters with which the poet has peopled it.

If in the perusal of any poet this is required, *Shakspeare*, of all poets, seems to claim it the most. Of all poets, Shakspeare appears to have possessed a fancy the most prolific, an imagination the most luxuriantly fertile. In this particular he has been

frequently compared to *Homer*, though those who have drawn the parallel, have done it, I know not why, with a sort of distrust of their assertion. Did we not look at the Greek with that reverential awe which his antiquity impresses, I think we might venture to affirm that in this respect the other is more than his equal. In invention of incident, in diversity of character, in assemblage of images, we can scarcely indeed conceive Homer to be surpassed; but in the mere creation of fancy, I can discover nothing in the *Iliad* that equals the *Tempest* or the *Macbeth* of Shakspeare. The machinery of Homer is indeed stupendous; but of that machinery the materials were known; or though it should be allowed that he added something to the mythology he found, yet still the language and the manners of his deities are merely the language and the manners of men. Of Shakspeare, the machinery may be said to be produced as well as combined by himself. Some of the beings of whom it is composed, neither tradition nor romance afforded him; and of those whom he borrowed thence, he invented the language and the manners,—language and manners peculiar to themselves, for which he could draw no analogy from mankind. Though formed by fancy, however, his personages are true to nature; and a reader of that pregnant imagination which I have mentioned above, can immediately decide on the justness of his conceptions; as he who beholds the masterly expression of certain portraits, pronounces

with confidence on their likeness, though unacquainted with the persons from whom they were drawn.

But it is not only in these untried regions of magic or of witchery, that the creative power of Shakspeare has exerted itself. By a very singular felicity of invention, he has produced, in the beaten field of ordinary life, characters of such perfect originality, that we look on them with no less wonder at his invention than on those preternatural beings which "are not of this earth;" and yet they speak a language so purely that of common society, that we have but to step abroad into the world to hear every expression of which it is composed. Of this sort is the character of *Falstaff*.

On the subject of this character I was lately discoursing with a friend, who is very much endowed with that critical imagination of which I have suggested the use in the beginning of this paper. The general import of his observations may form neither an useless nor unamusing field for speculation to my readers.

Though the character of Falstaff, said my friend, is of so striking a kind as to engross almost the whole attention of the audience in the representation of the play in which it is first introduced, yet it was probably only a secondary and incidental object with Shakspeare in composing that play. He was writing a series of historical dramas on the most remarkable events of the English history;

from the time of King *John* downwards. When he arrived at the reign of *Henry IV.*, the dissipated youth and extravagant pranks of the Prince of Wales could not fail to excite his attention, as affording at once a source of moral reflection in the serious department, and a fund of infinite humour in the comic part of the drama. In providing him with associates for his hours of folly and of riot, he probably borrowed, as was his custom, from some old play, interlude, or story, the names and incidents which he has used in the first part of Henry IV. *Oldcastle*, we know, was the name of a character in such a play, inserted there, it is probable (in those days of the church's omnipotence in every department of writing,) in odium of Sir John Oldcastle, chief of the Lollards, though Shakspeare afterwards, in a protestant reign, changed it to Falstaff. This leader of the gang, which the wanton extravagance of the Prince was to cherish and protect, it was necessary to endow with qualities sufficient to make the young Henry, in his society,

> ——————doff the world aside,
> And bid it pass.

Shakspeare therefore has endowed him with infinite wit and humour, as well as an admirable degree of sagacity and acuteness in observing the characters of men; but has joined those qualities with a grossness of mind which his youthful master could

not but see, nor seeing but despise. With talents less conspicuous, Falstaff could not have attracted Henry; with profligacy less gross and less contemptible, he would have attached him too much. Falstaff's was just "that unyoked humour of idleness" which the Prince could "a while uphold," and then cast off for ever. The audience to which this strange compound was to be exhibited were to be in the same predicament with the Prince, to laugh and to admire while they despised; to feel the power of his humour, the attraction of his wit, the justice of his reflections; while their contempt and their hatred attended the lowness of his manners, the grossness of his pleasures, and the unworthiness of his vice.

Falstaff is truly and literally "ex Epicuri grege porcus," placed here within the pale of this world to fatten at his leisure, neither disturbed by feeling, nor restrained by virtue. He is not, however, positively much a villain, though he never starts aside in the pursuit of interest or of pleasure, when knavery comes in his way. We feel contempt, therefore, and not indignation, at his crimes, which rather promotes than hinders our enjoying the ridicule of the situation, and the admirable wit with which he expresses himself in it. As a man of this world, he is endowed with the most superior degree of good sense and discernment of character; his conceptions, equally acute and just, he delivers with the expression of a clear and vigorous understanding; and we see that he thinks like a

wise man, even when he is not at the pains to talk wisely.

Perhaps, indeed, there is no quality more conspicuous throughout the writings of Shakspeare, than that of good sense, that intuitive sagacity with which he looks on the manners, the characters, and the pursuits of mankind. The bursts of passion, the strokes of nature, the sublimity of his terrors, and the wonderful creation of his fancy, are those excellences which strike spectators the most, and are therefore most commonly enlarged on; but to an attentive peruser of his writings, his acute perception and accurate discernment of ordinary character and conduct, that skill, if I may so express it, with which he delineates the plan of common life, will, I think, appear no less striking, and perhaps rather more wonderful; more wonderful, because we cannot so easily conceive that power of genius by which it tells us what actually exists, though it has never seen it, than that by which it creates what never existed. This power, when we read the works, and consider the situation of Shakspeare, we shall allow him in a most extraordinary degree. The delineation of manners found in the Greek tragedians is excellent and just; but it consists chiefly of those general maxims which the wisdom of the schools might inculcate, which a borrowed experience might teach. That of Shakspeare marks the knowledge of intimacy with mankind. It reaches the elevation of the great, and penetrates the obscurity of the low;

detects the cunning, and overtakes the bold; in short, presents that abstract of life in all its modes, and indeed in every time, which every one without experience must believe, and every one with experience must know to be true.[b]

With this sagacity and penetration into the characters and motives of mankind, which himself possessed, Shakspeare has invested Falstaff in a remarkable degree: he never utters it, however, out of character, or at a season where it might better be spared. Indeed, his good sense is rather in his thoughts than in his speech; for so we may call those soliloquies in which he generally utters it. He knew what coin was most current with those he dealt with, and fashioned his discourse according to the disposition of his hearers; and he sometimes lends himself to the ridicule of his companions, when he has a chance of getting any interest on the loan.

But we oftener laugh with than at him; for his humour is infinite, and his wit admirable. This quality, however, still partakes in him of that Epicurean grossness which I have remarked to be

[b] It is to this extraordinary conversancy with the human heart, this union and incorporation, as it were, with the character which he delineates, more than to any other of his exalted gifts, that Shakspeare is indebted for his supremacy over all other painters of the manners and passions of mankind; a supremacy which, in spite of every prejudice, whether national or individual, will one day be acknowledged with as much universality throughout the continents of the world as in his native island.

the ruling characteristic of his disposition. He has neither the vanity of a wit, nor the singularity of a humourist, but indulges both talents, like any other natural propensity, without exertion of mind or warmth of enjoyment. A late excellent actor, whose loss the stage will long regret,[1] used to represent the character of Falstaff in a manner different from what had been uniformly adopted from the time of *Quin* downwards. He exchanged the comic gravity of the old school for those bursts of laughter in which sympathetic audiences have so often accompanied him. From accompanying him it was indeed impossible to refrain; yet, though the execution was masterly, I cannot agree in that idea of the character. He who laughs is a man of feeling in merriment. Falstaff was of a very different constitution. He turned wit, as he says he did "disease, into commodity."—"Oh! it is much that a lie with a slight oath, and a *jest with a sad brow*, will do with a fellow that never had the ache in his shoulders."

MACKENZIE.[2]

[1] This evidently points to Henderson, who, notwithstanding the practice here noticed, and which it must be confessed was in more than one instance doubtless misplaced, gave, upon the whole, such a representation of Falstaff with regard to general truth and richness of colouring, as has not since been, and perhaps never will be exceeded.

[2] The Lounger, No. 68, May 20, 1786.

No. XVII.

CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE CHARACTER OF FALSTAFF CONCLUDED.

To a man of pleasure of such a constitution as Falstaff, temper and good humour were necessarily consequent. We find him therefore but once I think angry, and then not provoked beyond measure. He conducts himself with equal moderation towards others; his wit lightens, but does not burn; and he is not more inoffensive when the joker, than unoffended when joked upon: "I am not only witty myself, but the cause that wit is in other men." In the evenness of his humour he bears himself thus (to use his own expression), and takes in the points of all assailants without being hurt. The language of contempt, of rebuke, or of conviction, neither puts him out of liking with himself or with others. None of his passions rise beyond this control of reason, of self-interest, or of indulgence.

Queen Elizabeth, with a curiosity natural to a woman, desired Shakspeare to exhibit Falstaff as a lover. He obeyed her, and wrote the *Merry Wives of Windsor;* but Falstaff's love is only factor for his interest; and he wishes to make his

mistresses, "his exchequer, his East and West Indies, to both of which he will trade."

Though I will not go so far as a paradoxical critic has done, and ascribe valour to Falstaff; yet, if his cowardice is fairly examined, it will be found to be not so much a weakness as a principle. In his very cowardice there is much of the sagacity I have remarked in him; he has the sense of danger, but not the discomposure of fear. His presence of mind saves him from the sword of Douglas, where the danger was real; but he shows no sort of dread of the sheriff's visit, when he knew the Prince's company would probably bear him out: when Bardolph runs in frightened, and tells that the sheriff, with a most monstrous watch, is at the door, "Out, you rogue! (answers he) play out the play; I have much to say in behalf of that Falstaff." Falstaff's cowardice is only proportionate to the danger; and so would every wise man's be, did not other feelings make him valiant.

Such feelings, it is the very characteristic of Falstaff to want. The dread of disgrace, the sense of honour, and the love of fame, he neither feels, nor pretends to feel:

> ——— Like the fat weed
> That roots itself at ease on Lethe's wharf,

he is contented to repose on that earthy corner of sensual indulgence in which his fate has placed him, and enjoys the pleasures of the moment,

without once regarding those finer objects of delight which the children of fancy and of feeling so warmly pursue.

The greatest refinement of morals as well as of mind, is produced by the culture and exercise of the imagination, which derives, or is taught to derive, its objects of pursuit, and its motives of action, not from the senses merely, but from future considerations which fancy anticipates and realises. Of this, either as the prompter or the restraint of conduct, Falstaff is utterly devoid; yet his imagination is wonderfully quick and creative in the pictures of humour, and the associations of wit. But the "pregnancy of his wit," according to his own phrase, "is made a tapster;" and his fancy, how vivid soever, still subjects itself to the grossness of those sensual conceptions which are familiar to his mind. We are astonished at that art by which Shakspeare leads the powers of genius, imagination, and wisdom, in captivity to this son of earth; 'tis as if, transported into the enchanted island in the *Tempest*, we saw the rebellion of *Caliban* successful, and the airy spirits of Prospero ministering to the brutality of his slave.

Hence, perhaps, may be derived great part of that infinite amusement which succeeding audiences have always found from the representation of Falstaff. We have not only the enjoyment of those combinations and of that contrast to which philosophers have ascribed the pleasure we derive from wit in general, but we have that singular

combination and contrast which the gross, the sensual, and the brutish mind of Falstaff exhibits, when joined and compared with that admirable power of invention, of wit, and of humour, which his conversation perpetually displays.

In the immortal work of *Cervantes*, we find a character with a remarkable mixture of wisdom and absurdity, which in one page excites our highest ridicule, and in the next is entitled to our highest respect. *Don Quixote*, like Falstaff, is endowed with excellent discernment, sagacity, and genius; but his good sense holds fief of his diseased imagination, of his over-ruling madness for the achievements of knight-errantry, for heroic valour and heroic love. The ridicule in the character of Don Quixote consists in raising low and vulgar incidents, through the medium of his disordered fancy, to a rank of importance, dignity, and solemnity, to which in their nature they are the most opposite that can be imagined. With Falstaff it is nearly the reverse; the ridicule is produced by subjecting wisdom, honour, and other the most grave and dignified principles, to the control of grossness, buffoonery, and folly. 'Tis like the pastime of a family masquerade, where laughter is equally excited by dressing clowns as gentlemen, or gentlemen as clowns. In Falstaff, the heroic attributes of our nature are made to wear the garb of meanness and absurdity. In Don Quixote, the common and the servile are clothed in the dresses of the dignified and majestic; while,

to heighten the ridicule, *Sancho*, in the half-deceived simplicity, and half-discerning shrewdness of his character, is every now and then employed to pull off the mask.

If you will not think me whimsical in the parallel, continued my friend, I should say that Shakspeare has drawn, in one of his immediately subsequent plays, a tragic character very much resembling the comic one of Falstaff,—I mean that of *Richard III.* Both are men of the world; both possess that sagacity and understanding which is fitted for its purposes; both despise those refined feelings, those motives of delicacy, those restraints of virtue, which might obstruct the course they have marked out for themselves. The hypocrisy of both costs them nothing, and they never feel that detection of it to themselves which rankles in the conscience of less determined hypocrites. Both use the weaknesses of others, as skilful players at a game do the ignorance of their opponents; they enjoy the advantage, not only without self-reproach, but with the pride of superiority. Richard indeed aspires to the crown of England, because Richard is wicked and ambitious: Falstaff is contented with a thousand pounds of Justice Shallow's, because he is only luxurious and dissipated. Richard courts Lady Anne and the Princess Elizabeth for his purposes: Falstaff makes love to Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page for his. Richard is witty like Falstaff, and talks of his own figure with the same sarcastic indifference. Indeed, so much does

Richard, in the higher walk of villainy, resembles Falstaff in the lower region of roguery and dissipation, that it were not difficult to show, in the dialogue of the two characters, however dissimilar in situation, many passages and expressions in a style of remarkable resemblance.

Of feeling, and even of passion, both characters are very little susceptible; as Falstaff is the knave and the sensualist, so Richard is the villain of principle. Shakspeare has drawn one of passion in the person of *Macbeth*. Macbeth produces horror, fear, and sometimes pity; Richard, detestation and abhorrence only. The first he has led amidst the gloom of sublimity, has shown agitated by various and wavering emotions. He is sometimes more sanguinary than Richard, because he is not insensible of the weakness or the passion of revenge; whereas the cruelty of Richard is only proportionate to the object of his ambition, as the cowardice of Falstaff is proportionate to the object of his fear: but the bloody and revengeful Macbeth is yet susceptible of compassion, and subject to remorse. In contemplating Macbeth, we often regret the perversion of his nature; and even when the justice of Heaven overtakes him, we almost forget our hatred at his enormities in our pity for his misfortunes. Richard, Shakspeare has placed amidst the tangled paths of party and ambition; has represented cunning and fierce from his birth, untouched by the sense of humanity, hardly subject to remorse, and never to contrition;

and his fall produces that unmixed and perfect satisfaction which we feel at the death of some savage beast that had desolated the country from instinctive fierceness and natural malignity.

The weird-sisters, the gigantic deities of northern mythology, are fit agents to form Macbeth. Richard is the production of those worldly and creeping demons, who slide upon the earth their instruments of mischief to embroil and plague mankind. Falstaff is the work of *Circe* and her swinish associates, who, in some favoured hour of revelry and riot, moulded this compound of gross debauchery, acute discernment, admirable invention, and nimble wit, and sent him for a consort to England's madcap Prince, to stamp currency on idleness and vice, and to wave the flag of folly and dissipation over the seats of gravity, of wisdom, and of virtue.[k]

MACKENZIE.[l]

[k] "Yet, dangerous as such a delineation may appear, Shakspeare, with his usual attention to the best interests of mankind, has rendered it subservient to the most striking moral effects, both as these apply to the character of Falstaff himself, and to that of his temporary patron, the Prince of Wales; for while the virtue, energy, and good sense of the latter are placed in the most striking point of view by his firm dismissal of a most fascinating and too endeared voluptuary, the permanently degrading consequences of sensuality are exhibited in their full strength during the career, and in the fate, of the former.

"It is very generally found that great and splendid vices are mingled with concomitant virtues, which often ultimately

lead to self-accusation, and to the salutary agonies of remorse; but he who is deeply plunged in the grovelling pursuits of appetite is too frequently lost to all sense of shame, to all feeling of integrity or conscious worth. Polluted by the meanest depravities, not only religious principle ceases to affect the mind, but every thing which contributes to honour or to grandeur in the human character is gone for ever; a catastrophe to which wit and humour, by rendering the sensualist a more self-deluded and self-satisfied being, lend the most powerful assistance.

"Thus is it with Falstaff—to the last he remains the same, unrepentant, unreformed; and, though shaken off by all that is valuable or good around him, dies the very sensualist he had lived!

"We may, therefore, derive from this character as much instruction as entertainment; and, to the delight which we receive from the contemplation of a picture so rich and original, add a lesson of morality as awful and impressive as the history of human frailty can present."—Shakspeare and his Times, vol. ii. pp. 383, 384.

[1] The Lounger, No. 69, May 27, 1786.

No. XVIII.

ON THE CHARACTERS OF FALSTAFF AND HIS GROUP.

When it had entered into the mind of Shakspeare to form an historical play upon certain events in the reign of Henry the Fourth of England, the character of the Prince of Wales recommended itself to his fancy, as likely to supply him with a fund of dramatic incidents; for what could invention have more happily suggested than this character, which history presented ready to his hands? a riotous disorderly young libertine, in whose nature lay hidden those seeds of heroism and ambition, which were to burst forth at once to the astonishment of the world, and to achieve the conquest of France. This prince, whose character was destined to exhibit a revolution of so brilliant a sort, was not only in himself a very tempting hero for the dramatic poet, who delights in incidents of novelty and surprise, but also offered to his imagination a train of attendant characters, in the persons of his wild comrades and associates, which would be of themselves a drama. Here was a field for invention wide enough even for the genius of Shakspeare to range in. All the humours, passions, and extravagances of human life might

be brought into the composition; and when he had grouped and personified them to his taste and liking, he had a leader ready to place at the head of the train, and the truth of history to give life and interest to his drama.

With these materials ready for creation, the great artist sate down to his work; the canvas was spread before him, ample and capacious as the expanse of his own fancy; Nature put her pencil into his hand, and he began to sketch. His first concern was to give a chief or captain to this gang of rioters; this would naturally be the first outline he drew. To fill up the drawing of this personage he conceived a voluptuary, in whose figure and character there should be an assemblage of comic qualities; in his person he should be bloated and blown up to the size of a *Silenus*, lazy, luxurious, in sensuality a satyr, in intemperance a bacchanalian. As he was to stand in the post of a ringleader amongst thieves and cutpurses, he made him a notorious liar, a swaggering coward, vainglorious, arbitrary, knavish, crafty, voracious of plunder, lavish of his gains, without credit, honour, or honesty, and in debt to every body about him. As he was to be the chief seducer and misleader of the heir apparent of the crown, it was incumbent on the poet to qualify him for that part in such a manner as should give probability and even a plea to the temptation: this was only to be done by the strongest touches and the highest colourings of a master; by hitting off a humour of so happy,

so facetious, and so alluring a cast, as should tempt even royalty to forget itself, and virtue to turn reveller in his company. His lies, his vanity, and his cowardice, too gross to deceive, were to be so ingenious as to give delight; his cunning evasions, his witty resources, his mock solemnity, his vapouring self-consequence, were to furnish a continual feast of laughter to his royal companion. He was not only to be witty himself, but the cause of wit in other people; a whetstone for raillery; a buffoon, whose very person was a jest. Compounded of these humours, Shakspeare produced the character of *Sir John Falstaff;* a character, which neither ancient nor modern comedy has ever equalled, which was so much the favourite of its author as to be introduced in three several plays, and which is likely to be the idol of the English stage, as long as it shall speak the language of Shakspeare.

This character almost singly supports the whole comic plot of the first part of Henry the Fourth; the poet has indeed thrown in some auxiliary humours in the persons of Gadshill, Peto, Bardolph, and Hostess Quickley. The two first serve for little else except to fill up the action; but Bardolph as a butt to Falstaff's raillery, and the hostess in her wrangling scene with him, when his pockets had been emptied as he was asleep in the tavern, give occasion to scenes of infinite pleasantry. Poins is contrasted from the rest of the gang, and as he is made the companion of the prince, is very properly represented as a man of better qualities and morals

than Falstaff's more immediate hangers-on and dependents.

The humour of Falstaff opens into full display upon his very first introduction with the prince. The incident of the robbery on the high-way, the scene in Eastcheap in consequence of that ridiculous encounter, and the whole of his conduct during the action with Percy, are so exquisitely pleasant, that upon the renovation of his dramatic life in the second part of Henry the Fourth, I question if the humour does not in part evaporate by continuation; at least I am persuaded that it flattens a little in the outset, and though his wit may not flow less copiously, yet it comes with more labour, and is farther fetched. The poet seems to have been sensible how difficult it was to preserve the vein as rich as at first, and has therefore strengthened his comic plot in the second play with several new recruits, who may take a share with Falstaff, to whom he no longer entrusts the whole burthen of the humour. In the front of these auxiliaries stands Pistol, a character so new, whimsical, and extravagant, that if it were not for a commentator now living, whose very extraordinary researches amongst our old authors have supplied us with passages to illuminate the strange rhapsodies which Shakspeare has put into his mouth, I should for one have thought Antient Pistol as wild and imaginary a being as Caliban; but I now perceive, by the help of these discoveries, that the character is *made up in great part of absurd and fustian pas-*

sages from many plays, in which Shakspeare was versed, and perhaps *had been a performer*. Pistol's dialogue is a tissue of old tags of bombast, like the middle comedy of the Greeks, which dealt in parody. I abate of my astonishment at the invention and originality of the poet, but it does not lessen my respect for his ingenuity. Shakspeare founded his bully in parody; Jonson copied his from nature; and the palm seems due to Bobadil upon a comparison with Pistol. Congreve copied a very happy likeness from Jonson, and by the fairest and most laudable imitation produced his Noll Bluff, one of the pleasantest humourists on the comic stage.

Shallow and Silence are two very strong auxiliaries to this second part of Falstaff's humours; and though they do not absolutely belong to his family, they are nevertheless near of a kin, and derivatives from his stock. Surely two pleasanter fellows never trode the stage; they not only contrast and play upon each other, but Silence sober and Silence tipsy make the most comical reverse in nature: never was drunkenness so well introduced or so happily employed in any drama. The dialogue between Shallow and Falstaff, and the description given by the latter of Shallow's youthful frolics, are as true nature and as true comedy as man's invention ever produced: the recruits are also in the literal sense the recruits of the drama. These personages have the farther merit of throw-

ing Falstaff's character into a new cast, and giving it the seasonable relief of variety.

Dame Quickly also in this second part resumes her *rôle* with great comic spirit, but with some variation of character for the purpose of introducing a new member into the troop, in the person of Doll Tearsheet, the common trull of the times. Though this part is very strongly coloured, and though the scene with her and Falstaff is of a loose as well as ludicrous nature; yet, if we compare Shakspeare's conduct of this incident with that of the dramatic writers of his time, and even since his time, we must confess he has managed it with more than common care, and exhibited his comic hero in a very ridiculous light, without any of those gross indecencies which the poets of his age indulged themselves in without restraint.

The humour of the Prince of Wales is not so free and unconstrained as in the first part. Though he still demeans himself in the course of his revels, yet it is with frequent marks of repugnance and self-consideration, as becomes the conqueror of Percy; and we see his character approaching fast towards a thorough reformation. But though we are thus prepared for the change that is to happen when this young hero throws off the reveller, and assumes the king, yet we are not fortified against the weakness of pity, when the disappointment and banishment of Falstaff takes place, and the poet executes justice upon his inimitable delin-

quent with all the rigour of an unrelenting moralist. The reader or spectator, who has accompanied Falstaff through his dramatic story, is in debt to him for so many pleasant moments, that all his failings, which should have raised contempt, have only provoked laughter, and he begins to think they are not natural to his character, but assumed for his amusement. With these impressions we see him delivered over to mortification and disgrace, and bewail his punishment with a sensibility that is only due to the sufferings of the virtuous.[m]

As it is impossible to ascertain the limits of Shakspeare's genius, I will not presume to say he could not have supported his humour, had he chosen to have prolonged his existence through the succeeding drama of Henry the Fifth. We

[m] It is certainly to be regretted that such should be the impression resulting from the final disposal of Falstaff, which the poet might have avoided, had he rendered the punishment of the knight less severe; and instead of imprisonment, which ultimately occasioned his death, had he represented the king as being satisfied with the firm dismissal of the irreclaimable profligate. How much, indeed, is it to be wished that he had adopted the authority of Stowe, who tells us that, "after his coronation, King Henry called unto him all those young lords and gentlemen who were the followers of his young acts, *to every one of whom he gave rich gifts;* and then commanded that as many as would change their manners, as he intended to do, *should abide with him in his court;* and to all that would persevere in their former like conversation, *he gave express commandment, upon pain of their heads, never after that day to come into his presence.*"

may conclude that no ready expedient presented itself to his fancy, and he was not apt to spend much pains in searching for such; he therefore put him to death, by which he fairly placed him out of the reach of his contemporaries, and got rid of the trouble and difficulty of keeping him up to his original pitch, if he had attempted to carry him through a third drama, after he had removed the Prince of Wales out of his company, and seated him on the throne. I cannot doubt but there were resources in Shakspeare's genius, and a latitude of humour in the character of Falstaff, which might have furnished scenes of admirable comedy by exhibiting him in his disgrace; and both Shallow and Silence would have been accessaries to his pleasantry: even the field of Agincourt, and the distress of the king's army before the action, had the poet thought proper to have produced Falstaff on the scene, might have been as fruitful in comic incidents as the battle of Shrewsbury. This we can readily believe from the humours of Fluellen and Pistol, which he has woven into his drama; the former of whom is made to remind us of Falstaff, in his dialogue with Captain Gower, when he tells him that—*As Alexander is kill his friend Clytus being in his ales and his cups, so also Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and his goot judgements, is turn away the fat knight with the great pelly-doublet: He was full of jests and gypes and knaveries, and mocks; I am forget his name.—Sir John Falstaff.—That is he.*—This passage has

ever given me a pleasing sensation, as it marks a regret in the poet to part with a favourite character, and is a tender farewel to his memory: it is also with particular propriety that these words are put into the mouth of Fluellen, who stands here as his substitute, and whose humour, as well as that of Nym, may be said to have arisen out of the ashes of Falstaff.

CUMBERLAND.[a]

[a] The Observer, No. 86.

MEMORIALS OF SHAKSPEARE.

PART IV.

CONCLUDING ESSAY;

CONTAINING THREE MINIATURE PORTRAITS OF SHAKSPEARE BY DRYDEN, GOETHE, AND SIR WALTER SCOTT; AND A BRIEF PARALLEL BETWEEN SHAKSPEARE AND SIR WALTER SCOTT AS DELINEATORS OF CHARACTER.

I HAVE reserved for insertion in this fourth and concluding portion of my volume, three miniature portraits of Shakspeare from the pens of DRYDEN, GOETHE, and SIR WALTER SCOTT.

Amongst the numerous editors, commentators, and critics on Shakspeare, there are few perhaps, if any, who, in point of genius, can be put in competition with these three celebrated characters; and it is therefore truly gratifying to record, as emanating in all of them from great, and, in some degree, kindred talent, their deep-felt and pointedly expressed admiration of our immortal bard.

The criticisms of Dryden, indeed, couched as they were in the most rich, mellow, yet spirited prose composition of which our language affords an example, and annexed too, for the most part, in the form of prefaces and dedications, to works of great popularity, contributed more than any other means, perhaps, to keep alive, in an age of un-

paralleled frivolity and dissipation, some relish for manly and nervous composition; and there can be as little doubt but that the noble and comprehensive character of the genius of Shakspeare which the following striking though brief passage unfolds, must have powerfully recalled the attention of the public, even retrograding and debased as its taste had long been, to the matchless productions of this first of all dramatic writers.

"Shakspeare was the man," he remarks, "who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

"The consideration of this made Mr. Hales of

Eton say, that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in Shakspeare; and *however others are now generally preferred before him*, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him, Fletcher and Jonson, never equalled them to him in their esteem; and in the last king's court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakspeare far above him." °

After contemplating this very striking picture from the hand of powerful and unquestioned genius, though of a cast materially different from that which formed the object of its portraiture, let us now turn to a miniature sketch of the bard from the pencil of one whose dramatic powers are animated

° Essay on Dramatick Poesy—Malone's Dryden, vol. i. Part 2, pp. 98, 99. It has not been my object to include in this volume *metrical* characters of Shakspeare and his writings, as the greater part of these has been given in the Variorum editions of the bard; but there is one miniature sketch of this description that I do not remember to have seen enrolled in their lists, and which is, perhaps, without exception, the most sublime delineation of surpassing genius that, in so small a compass, was ever perfected by mortal pen. I shall therefore insert it here for the gratification of my readers:—

Thus, whilst I wond'ring pause o'er Shakspeare's page,
I mark in visions of delight the sage,
High o'er the wrecks of man, who stands sublime;
A column in the melancholy waste
(Its cities humbled and its glories past,)
Majestic mid the solitude of time.

WOLCOT.

by no small portion of the spirit which breathes through our *Romeo* and *Macbeth*, the tender and imaginative Goëthe. That the author of *Stella* and *Clavigo*, and *Goetz von Berlichingen*, and, above all, of *Faustus*, which partakes so largely of the wild and illimitable fancy of Shakspeare, should speak of our incomparable poet in terms of the highest enthusiasm, would naturally be supposed; and, accordingly, in one of his prose fictions, his *Wilhelm Meister*, he describes, in the person of this the chief character, his own feelings on becoming acquainted with the dramas of the English bard.

"They appear," he says, "the work of a celestial genius, which mixed with mankind in order to make us acquainted in the gentlest way with ourselves.—They are no poems! The reader seems to have open before him the immense books of fate, against which the tempest of busiest life is beating, so as to drive the leaves backwards and forwards with violence. All the anticipations which I ever experienced respecting man and his lot, and which, unnoticed by myself, have attended me from my youth, I find fulfilled and unfolded in Shakspeare's plays. It seems as if he had solved all enigmas for us, and yet it is impossible to say, *here or there is found the key*. His characters appear to be creatures of nature, and yet they are not. These most perplexing and most complicated of her productions act before us, in his pieces, as if they were clocks, of which the dial-plate and head were of crystal. They show,

according to their intention, the course of the hours; and you can see at the same time the springs and wheels which impel them."[p]

[p] Vide Monthly Review for 1798. vol. xxvii. pp. 544, 545.—The enthusiastic delight which Goëthe experienced on first reading Shakspeare, seems to have been felt in a nearly equal degree by a very recent writer, who has made us acquainted with his or her feelings, under similar circumstances, in the following striking and imaginative manner.

"I remember perfectly well it was on a warm summer evening that I strolled out to a favourite seat of mine under an old oak-tree, with a soft bank of moss round it, and so placed that it caught the last rays of the evening sun, and was away from every sound and noise except a little babbling brook that ran through the copse-wood. That evening I left my father dozing over his pipe and his newspaper, and stole out to my favourite haunt with the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' under my arm; and I never can forget the enthusiastic delight I felt on my first perusal of this piece. Fancy, gentle reader, if you have the least spark of poetry in your soul, fancy what it would be to read Shakspeare for the *first time*, and never to have heard of him before; to read him without prepossession and without expectation; to have the pleasure and vanity of *finding out* his beauties, without having seen him murdered on the stage, or mutilated in hackneyed quotations; to read him without reference to imputed plagiarism and disputed readings; in short, to come to him in all the freshness of poetic feelings and young enthusiasm; to be *able* to *feel* poetry, and to feel it for the first time by reading Shakspeare. One must have been almost situated as I was, to comprehend the rush of delight I experienced as I went on. It was like magic to me. I had no need of explanation, I had no need of knowledge to understand my subject; for Shakspeare is so truly a poet of nature, that, ignorant as I was of every thing *but* nature, my imagination readily conceived every thing he told. T

To these brief but beautiful delineations of the mighty mind of Shakspeare, alike estimable for their felicity of execution, and for the sources whence they issue, I have still one to add, which, as emanating from genius yet more kindred in its character, cannot fail to be felt as a tribute of peculiar value. The sweetest reward, indeed, which

novelty to me of dramatic dialogue brought the scene completely before my eyes; and in the play I first read, most of the characters are so entirely fanciful, they called back again some of the dear wild visions I had discarded, and I was carried back to the poetry of my childhood's thoughts. The closing light of the evening forced me to shut the book; but I sat a long time under the oak-tree musing on the scenes I had read, till my fancy had peopled every hollow tree and distant dell with elves and spirits; and I almost expected to see a Hermia and a Helena come out from the recesses of the wood. Love, such as is so beautifully described in this play, was, as yet, an incomprehensible feeling to me; but I placed it with the world of sensations and ideas that were yet mysteries; for I daily felt the truth of the observation, that the more one knows, the more one finds still unknown. I had not yet begun to find myself ignorant, for the acquisition of the very little knowledge I possessed was so sudden, that I had not recovered from the blaze of my own acquirements. A single taper will dazzle the eyes of one who has just emerged from darkness. Shakspeare was a library to me of poetry, of philosophy, of morality; I read his works till I almost knew them by heart; and to those days of my ignorance, when I knew only poetry and nature, do I look back as the purest and happiest of my life: other joys came more rapturous, other pride of higher attainments; but that evening when I read Shakspeare for the first time, and felt as it were a new soul awakened within me, was, I repeat, one of the happiest of my life."—The Pine-tree Dell, and Other Tales, 2 vols. 12mo. 1827.

genius can taste, must flow from the eulogy of approximating talent; and if, as is the cherished creed of some, it ever be permitted to the disembodied spirit to be conscious of what is passing on its former field of being, we may, without a charge of enthusiasm, picture our immortal bard as listening, not only with complacency but delight, to praise from one whom Britain since his own days has not seen equalled for fertility of imagination, and an almost inexhaustible fecundity in the knowledge and developement of human character.

The reader will immediately perceive that, in saying this, I allude to *Sir Walter Scott*, who, at a recent convivial meeting of subscribers for the establishment of a Theatrical Fund at Edinburgh, took occasion, whilst commenting on the benevolent purpose for which they were assembled, to introduce the following testimony of his deep veneration for the genius of Shakspeare.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, after craving a bumper all over, "I now wish to offer a libation of reverence and respect to the memory of Shakspeare. He was a man of universal genius; and from a period soon after his own era to the present day, he has been universally idolized. When I come to his honoured name, I am like the sick man who hung up his crutches at the shrine, and was obliged to confess that he did not walk better than before. It is indeed difficult, Gentlemen, to compare him to any other individual. The only one to whom I can at all compare him, is the won-

derful Arabian Dervise, who dived into the body of each, and in that way became familiar with the thoughts and secrets of their hearts, He was a man of obscure origin, and, as a player, limited in his acquirements. But he was born evidently with an universal genius. His eyes glanced at all the varied aspects of life, and his fancy pourtrayed with equal talents the king on the throne, and the clown who crackles his chesnuts at the Christmas fire. Whatever note he takes, he strikes it just and true, and awakens a corresponding chord in our own bosoms. Gentlemen, I propose the memory of William Shakspeare."

Glee. "Lightly tread the hallowed ground."

It is scarcely possible to read this extempore effusion of cordial applause, and from such a quarter, without being almost insensibly drawn into a comparison between two writers, who, if not in the very form of their productions, yet in many of the attributes of exalted genius, are closely allied.

Excellence, indeed, as well in the structure of the romance as of the drama, must be chiefly based on an intimate knowledge of the diversities of human character, and on the capability of unfolding this knowledge in the most distinct and impressive manner; qualities which, I may venture to affirm, have nowhere been found in greater perfection, or clothed in more attractive colours than in the dramas of Shakspeare, and the romances of Scott.

It will not therefore, I trust, be deemed irrelevant, if, on an occasion like this, and whilst the praise of Shakspeare is as it were flowing warm from the lips of living genius, I close this volume and the series of portraits of Shakspeare, by a short parallel between him and his celebrated eulogist, as far at least as will apply to their very superior merit in the conception and maintenance of character.

The comparison, indeed, as including the wide range of *historical, female, humorous,* and *imaginative* characters, may be said to embrace a large portion of what constitutes the first order of talent; for pre-eminence in characterization, whether employed in bringing forward existing, or in moulding new forms, is assuredly one of the most valuable, and at the same time one of the most rare of intellectual gifts.

To reproduce with vigour, and to support with consistency throughout a series of important action, and the play of all the passions, some of the most prominent characters of history, is perhaps, of all the achievements of poetry and romance, the most difficult. The peculiarly successful efforts of Shakspeare in this department are well known. In English history his regal characters of *John, Richard the Second, Richard the Third, Henry the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth,* and *Eighth;* his *Constance* and his *Katherine;* and of inferior rank, his *Falconbridge, Hotspur, Wolsey, John of Gaunt, Beaufort, Gloster, Warwick,* &c. &c., need only to be

mentioned to be praised; whilst in Roman story, his *Brutus, Antony,* and *Coriolanus,* are not less faithful or less brilliant portraits.

If we now turn to our celebrated contemporary, it will be found that he has little occasion in this department to shrink from a comparison with his great predecessor; for, independent of spirited sketches of Charles the Second, Cromwell, and the Pretender, he has given us elaborate and full length pictures of *Richard the First, Mary of Scotland, Elizabeth,* and *James the First,* of which the costume and keeping are presented with almost matchless fidelity and force. A nearly equal degree of praise may be extended to his delineations of foreign regal character in the persons of *Saladin* and *Louis the Eleventh;* nor has he represented with a less discriminating pencil the powerful thanes of his native land, a *Montrose,* a *Murray,* and *Argyle,* or the more subtile and licentious nobles of England, as *Leicester, Buckingham,* &c. &c.

It has been affirmed of Shakspeare by some critics of no mean note, that he has not exhibited his usual variety and originality in drawing the *female* character; ascribing the deficiency in a great degree to the custom, in his day, of not admitting actresses on the stage, the parts of women being always personated by boys.[1] It

[1] It is somewhat extraordinary that the admirable Collins, than whom no one has better appreciated, in other respects, the genius of Shakspeare, appears to have entertained a similar

requires, however, but a slight inspection of his dramas to prove this opinion to be utterly without foundation; and, indeed, to establish what in truth is really the case, that in no writer do we meet with a more interesting and discriminative portraiture of female manners. Setting aside the gloomy portion of the picture, as exemplified in the dark characters of Regan, Gertrude, Lady Macbeth, &c., and dwelling only on its loveliest lights, into what a paradise of varied beauty and

erroneous supposition of his deficiency in exhibiting the female character; for on noticing Fletcher's succession to the theatre as a dramatic poet, he draws the following comparison between him and his great predecessor :—

Of softer mould the gentle Fletcher came,
The next in order, as the next in name;
With pleas'd attention, 'midst his scenes we find
Each glowing thought that warms the female mind;
Each melting sigh, and every tender tear,
The lover's wishes, and the virgin's fear.
His every strain the Smiles and Graces own;
But stronger Shakspeare *felt for man alone:*
Drawn by his pen, our ruder passions stand
Th' unrivall'd picture of his early hand.

EPISTLE TO SIR THOMAS HANMER.

May I be allowed in this place to mention the very excellent edition of Collins, which has just fallen into my hands, under the superintendence of the Rev. Alexander Dyce, A.B.? It is by many degrees the most complete and satisfactory edition of Collins which we possess; for besides the biography of Johnson, and the commentary of Langhorne, it contains a large body of illustrative notes, biographical and critical, by the editor and his friends, all the various readings, and a numerous selection of parallel passages.

excellence are we instantly admitted! Where shall we look for more exquisite creations than this great magician has brought before us in the chaste love and fidelity of *Juliet* and *Desdemona*, in the romantic tenderness of *Imogen* and *Viola*, in the filial affection of *Cordelia* and *Ophelia*, in the *naïveté* and simplicity of *Perdita* and *Miranda*, in the vivacity and wit of *Rosalind* and *Beatrice*, and in the sublimity of virtue in *Isabella* and *Portia*?

It is to the pages of Sir Walter Scott that we must again revert for a rival display of talent in this the most delightful province of characterization, his romances abounding in the richest and most diversified forms of female tenderness, constancy, and heroism. He had early given indeed, in his metrical pieces in this department of fiction, some very interesting sketches of the kind, and especially in his portraits of *Ellen* in the "Lady of the Lake," and of *Edith* in the "Lord of the Isles," both touched with a graceful and truly fascinating pencil. But it is to his prose romances that we must turn for the most decided proofs of his originality in delineating the varied attractions of the fair sex. There, whether we recal to mind the picture of disastrous or unrequited love in the sufferings of *Amy Robsart*, *Lucy Ashton*, and *Effie Deans*; the frolic archness, irresistible good humour, and ever-shifting buoyancy of spirit, in *Mysie Happer*, *Brenda Troil*, and *Catharine Seyton*; the intellectual, disinterested, and lovely features of *Diana Vernon*; the firmness and self-devotedness

of *Jeannie Deans*, and the romantic yet noble-minded heroism of *Minna Troil*, *Rebecca*, and *Flora Mac Ivor*; we are alike delighted and surprised at the wealth and discrimination, the strength and versatility of his genius.

No man has equalled Shakspeare in the delineation of *humorous character*. It might be sufficient, on this occasion, perhaps merely to mention, as adequate proof of the assertion, the inimitable *Falstaff* and his *followers*; but when we also recollect those exquisite originals, *Shallow*, *Slender*, and *Silence*; when the portraits of *Dame Quickley*, *Sir Toby Belch*, *Sir Andrew Ague-cheek*, and *Malvolio* come before us, and we turn to those pleasant fellows, *Launcelot*, *Autolycus*, *Parolles*, *Dogberry*, *Verges*, *Touchstone*, *Bottom*, *Christophero Sly*, and a host of others which might be catalogued, it is impossible not to stand amazed at the exhaustless fertility of his powers, nor, whilst contemplating such a varied mass of comic painting, to withhold our assent from those who consider this department as that in which his genius most perfectly luxuriated; a deduction, however, which ceases to predominate, so universal is the empire of his talents, as soon as the sublimer creations of his fancy are presented to our view.

After such an estimate of the powers of Shakspeare in the formation of humorous character, it may justly be considered as a daring attempt to seek for an adequate competitor; in short, prolific as this country has been in productions of

humour from the time of Ben Jonson to the present day, the effort, I am persuaded, would be fruitless; yet can we bring forward such recent names as Fielding, Smollet, and Sterne, nor will that of Sir Walter Scott yield either in pretension or power to any one of this celebrated trio. I feel inclined, indeed, to place Sir Walter before them, in consequence of his greater adhesion to the truth and modesty of nature; and though we cannot select from his works any comic personage that may altogether rival Falstaff, yet who will deny very extraordinary merit to the conception and keeping of such a character as *Baillie Jarvie*, which, without any tendency to extravagance or caricature, yet exhibits the most marked and original traits of humour. We may also mention as admirably sustained throughout, and touched indeed with the pencil of a Hogarth, the very amusing characters of the *Baron Bradwardine*, of *Dandie Dinmont*, the *Antiquary*, and *Douce Davie Deans*; nor should *Friar Tuck* and *Dalgetty* be forgotten, beside a swarm of characters in low Scottish life very boldly brought out, and finished with the strictest attention to national point and manners.[r] Like Shakspeare, indeed, Sir Walter

[r] Amongst these I would particularise, as of singular excellency for fidelity of delineation, and warmth of colouring, the characters of *Cuddie Headrigg* and his mother *Mause*, in "Old Mortality." Their parts form a prominent portion of the narrative, and are preserved to the last with unabated spirit and humour.

appears to be deeply imbued with a love of the ludicrous; nor has any writer since our great dramatist exhibited so many proofs of a perfect mastery in the difficult and dangerous province of tragi-comedy, his romances being rich in instances where broad humour and deep pathos are not only brought into contact, bnt mingled throughout, and not unfrequently with the effect of heightening each other. He is also not less partial than the bard of Avon to the introduction of the domestic fool, or what approximates to this character, the butt or buffoon. In the first of these draughts he has given us a perfectly Shakspearian transcript in the person of *David Gellatly* in Waverley; in the second he has not unfrequently failed, and Caleb, in the "Bride of Lammermoor," and Claud Halcro, in the "Pirate," may be referred to as instances. Nevertheless, as a result, it will not be going too far to remark that in the romances of Scott, as in the dramas of Shakspeare, there is an exuberant wealth of humorous delineation; such, in short, as will not be met with in equal raciness and profusion in any other writer in our language since the death of Ben Jonson.

It is, however, in the last department of character-painting which I have to notice, namely, the *imaginative*, that the omnipotence of genius appears to be most unequivocally developed. It is the province also in which it will be found most difficult, I will not say to rival, but to approximate to the mighty powers of Shakspeare. When the daring

creations of this potent magician rise before us; when *Ariel* and *Caliban*, and the *Midsummer Fairies*, those splendid emanations of an unbounded fancy, are given to our view; when the wizard powers of *Prospero*, and the unhallowed deeds of the *Weird Sisters*, unfold their dark and mystic agency; and, above all, when the grave is summoned to give up its charge, and the awful *Spirit of the Royal Dane* passes before our shuddering senses; how deeply do we feel the spells of the poet, and how thoroughly during their influence are we convinced, that no human imagination can surpass the powers which these astonishing efforts proclaim!

Nevertheless, extraordinary as these supernatural pictures most assuredly are, the conception of such characters as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Shylock*, is scarcely less wonderful, and, in point of execution, as admitting of immediate comparison with the scale of human life, still more difficult to clothe in the features of originality; and yet where shall we find such correct, and, at the same time, such bold and original delineations of ambition, terror, madness, and revenge, as are brought forward in these masterly compounds from nature and imagination?

I know not that any greater eulogy can be passed on the inventive faculties of any individual, than to be able justly to say of him, that in this, the most arduous province of characterization, he has made the nearest approach to the genius of Shakspeare. It is an eulogy, however, which, on duly consider-

ing the fertility and beauty of his creations in this department, may, I think, be justly passed on Sir Walter Scott. Throughout, indeed, the whole series of his fictions, whether in poetry or prose, from the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* to *Woodstock*, there is a display of power in the delineation of the imaginative and the grand, the gloomy and the mysterious, in scenery, incident, and beyond all in character, which almost perpetually reminds us of the wild and wonderful, the appalling and terrific, in the imperishable pictures of Shakspeare.

Let us, for example, summon into view a few of the numerous characters which Sir Walter has gifted with energies either preternatural, or approximating towards it; beings, in short, which may be said to hover on the confines of another world. He has not, it is true, except in one or two instances, ventured to introduce an agent entirely superhuman, that beautiful apparition, the *White Lady of Avenel*, constituting the fullest and most perfect delineation of the kind; but, like the bard of Avon, he has delighted to wander into the realms of magic, divination, and witchcraft, and to exhibit characters yet more anomalous, with faculties bordering on the wild and unearthly. Of this latter description the *Black Dwarf* and *Fenella* are striking examples, whilst of the closely allied characters of the *magician*, *astrologer*, and *alchymist*, we have numerous portraits, amongst which may be particularized those of *Michael Scott*,

Galeotti, and *Demetrius*. The *Three Hags* in the "Bride of Lammermoor" impress their full effect on the mind, even whilst recollecting the Weird Sisters in Macbeth; and that combination of the ancient *sybil* with the modern *gipsey*, which may be recognised in the persons of *Meg Merrilies*, *Madge Wildfire*, *Helen Macgregger*, and *Norna Troil*, has produced pictures of uncommon strength and energy.*

But where, it may be asked, shall we find in the works of our accomplished contemporary, characters which in point of blended passion and sublimity, of mingled nature and imagination, can compete with such delineations as Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, and Shylock? It can only be answered that neither from this source, nor from any other uninspired composition, can perfect parallels be adduced; but, at the same time, it will, I think,

* Since this was written, Sir Walter has produced another character of this latter cast, in his first tale of the *Chronicles of the Canongate*, entitled "The Highland Widow." The portraiture, indeed, of *Elspat Mac Tavish*, which, like those mentioned in the text, exhibits several traits bordering on the supernatural, though last in point of date, is certainly first in point of execution; surpassing in its power of impression the author's most spirited previous sketch of the kind, his Meg Merrilies.

I cannot, whilst thus casually alluding to this very recent work, avoid remarking that the whole of what relates to the agency of the assumed chronicler, *Mr. Crystal Croftangry*, is imagined with peculiar felicity, and sustained with a vein of originality and humour, of which even Sir Walter has not given us a more finished specimen.

be readily allowed that the compositions of Sir Walter Scott abound in that species of characterization which combines the play of the loftier passions, and exhibits the union of high intellectual force and grandeur with the splendid and ever-varying colouring of a rich and plastic fancy; and that this fecundity and originality in the creation and keeping of such characters as *Marmion*, *Roderic Dhu*, *Fergus Mac Ivor*, *Ravenswood*, and *Balfour of Burley*, not to mention many others of nearly equal excellence, entitle him not only to very high consideration in this noblest department of genius, but rank him even here, (the inexhaustible fertility of his invention in it being duly weighed,) next to our beloved Shakspeare.

There are, indeed, no two other writers, either in our own or any other language, who in the kindred provinces of the drama and romance have brought forward such numerous, and, at the same time, such varied and well sustained groups of characters; nor any, I may venture to say, who, as the result of their intimate knowledge of human life and manners, have been the means of diffusing more extensive and unalloyed delight. It may, in fine, be asserted that the very nature and being of many of the most remarkable characters on record are here more impressively felt and understood, more boldly and effectively brought out, than in the didactic and more elaborated pages of the mere philosopher and historian; and, what is

praise transcending all other, that the moral, the instruction to be derived from these writings, is commensurate with the pleasure which they bestow.

THE END.

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